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Asylum and the Media in Scotland

A report on the portrayal of Asylum in the Scottish Media undertaken by the
Oxfam Asylum Positive Images Network and Glasgow Caledonian University



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The Scottish Centre for Journalism Studies
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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	3
Terminology	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
1. CONTEXT	15
Previous research on asylum and the media	15
The current study	19
2. ANALYSIS OF CONTENT	23
Methodology	23
Asylum in the newspapers	28
3. THE MAIN THEMES	38
Detention and Dungavel	38
Crime	53
Government policy	61
4. CONCLUSION	73
5. REFERENCES	83

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Dr. Anthea Irwin of Glasgow Caledonian University took on the task of reviewing the articles collated by Oxfam in its media monitoring and provided the analysis — including the sections on crime, detention, and UK policy — that makes up a large part of this report.

This report was edited by David Wilson.



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Terminology

Refugee Someone who has fled to another country because of a “well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (Article 1 1951 Refugee Convention) and who has been granted refugee status by the national authorities.

Asylum Seeker Someone who has fled to another country in order to make an asylum claim i.e. a request for refugee status.

Economic Migrant Someone who migrates to another country in search of economic betterment.

Illegal Immigrant A foreign national who travels to and remains in a country without declaring him/herself to the authorities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Instead of being viewed as a humanitarian issue — where there is an international obligation to protect people seeking asylum — the media debate on asylum has become increasingly negative, characterised by stereotypes and a narrow focus on numbers and costs. Previous studies have revealed asylum seekers to be the object of open prejudice on the part of newspapers and television, in a way that no other group is discriminated against. Asylum seekers have reported that negative media coverage has a direct, and sometimes violent, impact on their lives.

Oxfam established the Asylum Positive Images Project in May 2004. It sought to measure public and political attitudes towards asylum and to build on research done by previous projects on the way asylum is reported by the media. Over a three-month period in late 2004, it monitored all the articles appearing in a sample of Scottish newspapers on the subject of refugees and people seeking asylum in the UK.

It also commissioned two MORI Scotland polls to gauge opinions on asylum, and surveyed people seeking asylum in Glasgow via a questionnaire. The research provides a baseline of information that complements the work of previous studies, but which is uniquely Scottish in context.

Analysis of content

On average, three articles on asylum appeared each day in the Scottish press during the monitoring period, 242 in total. Two papers, the *Scottish Daily Mail* and the *Scottish Daily Express* between them accounted for 36 per cent of all coverage. Other papers, such as *The Herald*, the *Scottish Daily Mirror*, the *Scottish Sun* and *The Scotsman* also carried a significant number of articles on asylum. Fewer appeared in the *Daily Record*, the *Dundee Courier*, *The Press and Journal*, and the *Glasgow Evening Times*.

News with a Scottish focus accounted for 46 per cent of all coverage. News stories were the predominant type of article, accounting for 69 per cent of the total, but features, letters, editorial leaders, and opinion pieces were also considered. Asylum made the front page 12 times during the monitoring period. The *Scottish Daily Express* and the *Scottish Daily Mail* each placed it there three times. Letters from readers — including members of the public, NGOs, politicians, and on one occasion a person seeking asylum — accounted for 12 per cent of the total.

Sixty per cent of headlines contained a keyword such as 'asylum', 'asylum seeker', 'refugee', or 'Dungavel' (the name of a removal centre in Scotland). The most common label applied to people seeking asylum was 'asylum seeker', but many articles used a combination of labels, sometimes interchangeably. Also used was 'failed asylum seeker', often interchangeably with terms such as 'illegal immigrant', 'economic migrant', or 'immigration detainee'.

Of 191 news and feature articles, 158 relied on a named primary source, of whom 35 per cent were politicians. The next largest group was legal professionals, then refugees themselves. Contributions also came from (primarily right-wing) think tanks, and voluntary organisations and NGOs working in the refugee sector. Campaigning, pro-asylum voices were more evident in articles that had a Scottish, rather than a UK-wide, focus.

Photographs were used most commonly in the context of stories on detention. The most common type of image was one depicting refugee men, while the next largest group was pictures of politicians. Only ten photographs depicted refugee women or children.

The main themes

The main themes covered were detention, crime and government policy on asylum and immigration. There were few stories about why people seek asylum in the UK or about the positive contribution they may be able to make. Most of the positive stories had a Scottish focus.

The *Scottish Daily Mirror* and *The Herald* both took a generally pro-asylum stance, criticising the detention of asylum seekers. Articles about the 'cost' of asylum and statistically based stories about numbers of people seeking asylum were mostly found in the *Scottish Daily Mail* and the *Scottish Daily Express*. Between them, these two papers accounted for more than half of all articles on this theme.

Different papers often covered the same events in strikingly different ways, and a number of case studies were chosen for detailed analysis. These focused on factors such as the positioning of the article within the newspaper, the language used in headlines and body text (both explicit and implicit), the sources quoted, and the use of photographs.

Detention

In July 2004 a detainee at the Harmondsworth removal centre outside London committed suicide, which provoked a disturbance there. A number of detainees were then transferred to Dungavel Removal Centre in South Lanarkshire, the only removal centre in Scotland, where a few days later another detainee killed himself. There were significant variations in the way the newspapers portrayed the relationships of cause and effect between these events.

Reporting the events at Harmondsworth, few mentioned the suicide in their headlines, although several focused on the 'riot' and the damage caused by it. The *Express* in

particular used war metaphors to portray the asylum seekers concerned as a threat to security e.g.: 'Riot forces fought a 16-hour battle to quell an uprising by asylum seekers yesterday at the UK's leading detention centre'. The Mail's headline read: '£5m asylum riot' and blamed 'Jamaican nationals' for orchestrating 'the fire-raising and wrecking spree'. It claimed they had 'spread rumours' that the man found hanged had been murdered, but cited no source or evidence for this.

Both the *Express* and *Mail* highlighted what they called 'luxurious' conditions at Harmondsworth, the *Express* referring to the centre in a headline as an 'asylum hotel'; the *Mail* discussing it in a supporting piece headlined: 'Locked up in comfort'. This suggested that the asylum seekers were trouble-makers, who were solely to blame for the violence.

The three papers which focused on cost — the *Sun*, the *Express*, and the *Mail* — differed widely in their estimates of the final bill. The *Sun* put it at 'tens of thousands', the *Express* at '£500,000', and the *Mail* at '£5m'. None of the three provided any source for the sum it suggested.

The *Herald* put the second suicide, at Dungavel, into the context of other asylum deaths in detention, and quoted a spokesperson from the Scottish Human Rights Centre on the negative psychiatric effects of detention. *The Scotsman* focused on the police investigation, but also quoted a number of anti-detention campaigners. The *Mirror* was unequivocal. A leader was headlined: 'Asylum shame' and began: 'The death of an asylum seeker at Dungavel marks a new low in the history of this vile detention centre'.

The *Mail*, on the other hand, buried the story on page 23. Its headline read: 'Riot fear after suicide at Dungavel asylum centre', although there had been no violence, apart from the suicide itself. The article began: 'Fears of severe unrest among asylum seekers held at detention centres were growing last night after an inmate killed himself after being caught up

in a riot.' Anyone reading only the first half of this article might believe that the suicide was caused by the riot at Harmondsworth, and by extension that it was the fault of other asylum seekers.

Crime

Articles dealt both with crimes committed *by* asylum seekers (sometimes allegedly) and crimes committed *against* asylum seekers. The first case study chosen for analysis concerned a female police officer in southern England, who claimed that levels of crime among asylum seekers were much higher than those acknowledged by the local council. The second concerned a Scottish judge, who jailed a number of local youths for racist attacks committed against asylum seekers.

In the first case, certain newspapers presented the WPC's opinions as fact, when in reality they were contentious and disputed by the local councillors to whom they were made. The headline in the *Scottish Daily Mail*, for instance, read: 'WPC who dared to tell truth on asylum seekers'. The *Scottish Daily Express* headline read: 'Praise for WPC who spoke out' and claimed: 'A straight-talking policewoman was the toast of the town last night for daring to tell the truth on how asylum seekers were wrecking residents' lives'. In both cases, quotes from the councillors were included, but at the end of the story. In the *Express*, a councillor is quoted as saying: 'We believe the facts and figures used by the WPC were anecdotal and are yet to be substantiated'. However, as many newspaper readers tend to absorb just the headline and first few paragraphs of a story, this 'balancing' quote could easily have been missed.

The story about the sheriff jailing teenagers for racist attacks was a 'Scottish' story, and received wider coverage. Papers such as the *Scottish Daily Mirror* and *The Herald* were generally sympathetic, giving prominence to the sheriff's comments that such attacks had

become 'a sport' for local youths. The *Mail* and the *Express* also carried the story, but less prominently. While they portrayed the youths negatively, they also downplayed the issue of asylum.

A few days later, the *Mail* turned the debate around in a way that could be seen to blame asylum seekers themselves for the attacks they had been subjected to. A headline and sub-head read: 'Asylum and the racist crimewave' and 'Immigration crisis blamed for explosion in race-hate attacks'. The paper stated that the incidence of attacks had increased alongside 'soaring immigration', and continued: 'There are fears the country will face increased racial tension and violence if the situation is allowed to continue unchecked'. These 'fears' were not sourced, but the paper did claim that the increase in attacks had occurred 'since Labour came to power in 1997', thus implying that the government was also to blame.

Government policy

Two reports on asylum in the UK and other countries were published during the period of research — one by a centre-right think tank, the Policy Exchange, the other by the Home Office. *The Herald* and *The Press and Journal* focused in a relatively positive way on the fact that asylum seekers were choosing to come to the UK. The *Scottish Sun*, however, used the Policy Exchange data selectively to claim that Britain was: 'Tops for asylum' and: 'the No 1 destination for asylum seekers among the wealthy G7 nations — letting in 1,000 times more than Japan'.

The *Express*'s story was similar, and appeared to use the terms 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' interchangeably. It said the 'devastating' report came from a 'respected think tank', without stating its ideological position. The article included a graph relating to asylum applications that looked scientific, but which presented data very selectively. The *Express*

also printed an opinion piece by the Shadow Home Secretary, David Davis, which attacked the government's policy on asylum.

The Home Office report suggested that the number of asylum applications was falling. The *Glasgow Evening Times* and *The Scotsman* reported this in a relatively factual way though other papers, such as the *Dundee Courier* and *The Press and Journal*, were sceptical of the government's figures, pointing out that while asylum figures were down, overall numbers of immigrants were increasing. The *Sun*, however, claimed: 'Ministers were last night accused of using a drop in asylum claims to conceal the true scale of illegal immigration'.

On the basis of this report the *Daily Mail* devoted a whole page to the issue of asylum, with a main article headlined: '140,000 migrants settle in Britain in one year'. This made no distinction between immigrants, asylum seekers, or any other group, but implied simply that the figure was too high. It contrasted the fall in asylum figures with the higher number of work permits granted, which would 'swallow up' the difference. A supporting piece about asylum seekers protesting against conditions at a centre implied they were simply causing trouble.

The *Daily Express* ran a double-page spread headed: 'Asylum: the spin ... and the reality'. The main article claimed that the fall in asylum applications was explained simply by a rise in illegal immigration. It contained many statistics, but put few into context. Like the *Mail*, the *Express* ran a subsidiary piece on protesting asylum seekers. The spread also included two boxes on government policy labelled 'What they say' and 'What they mean'.

In August 2004, after making certain controversial remarks, the Italian minister Rocco Buttiglione was prevented from taking up a new post as the EU's Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner. Most of the UK media reported negatively on what he said, but the *Scottish*

Daily Express picked up on his comments about asylum and immigration in a full-page article headed: 'Everyone knows Britain is a soft touch on asylum'.

The piece used emotive language such as: 'Asylum seekers heading for Europe are a "ticking timebomb", Britain was warned last night.' A supporting piece focused on the alleged criminality of Iraqi asylum seekers, and there was a box asking the loaded question 'Does Britain need more immigrants? Yes/No'. In addition, the *Express* ran a leader headed: 'Time to heed warnings'. This quoted language used by Sig. Buttiglione such as 'timebomb' and referred to the 'influx' that 'could swamp parts of the EU'.

Conclusion

Many papers failed to provide a full context for the events they reported. Articles about the suicide at Dungavel, for example, took varying steps back along the chain of cause and effect, but not all of them mentioned the suicide at Harmondsworth. In their coverage of the two reports on asylum numbers, both the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* headlines focused selectively on relatively minor aspects of the findings.

Papers varied greatly in the sources they chose to quote, but most quotes came from politicians. Some articles were relatively balanced, while others quoted a spokesperson from only one political party. NGOs working with asylum seekers were represented in some reports, although asylum seekers themselves were quoted only a handful of times. Several of the papers were sympathetic, to differing degrees, to asylum seekers and some even took a campaigning stance. However, there were only a few positive stories about asylum seekers.

Asylum seemed to be further up the news agenda for certain papers than for others, and there were differences in the way it was presented. Papers with a generally anti-asylum

stance tended to carry reports of the suicide and violence at Harmondsworth (focusing on the violence) towards the front of the paper, but reports of the suicide at Dungavel towards the back, while papers with a pro-asylum stance did the opposite. The *Scottish Daily Mail's* first report of racist crimes against asylum seekers appeared on page 27, while its subsequent article on the issue, linking the crimes to a rise in immigration, appeared on the front page.

Numbers, for the most part, appear to have been correctly used. However, in certain cases the selective presentation of statistics could affect the way readers understand an issue. Failing to declare the political stance of an organisation such as the think tank Policy Exchange, for example, had important implications for the way readers interpreted its figures.

It would seem that the phrase 'illegal asylum seeker' is still used and was found in a handful of articles, and there is considerable evidence of labels such as 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', and 'immigrant' being used interchangeably, clouding their meaning. Of equal concern is the use of metaphors for asylum seekers. The *Scottish Daily Mail* claimed that 'soaring' immigration figures would 'more than swallow up' any fall in asylum numbers, while the *Scottish Daily Express* used military metaphors to describe the violence at Harmondsworth. The fact that one paper (the *Express*) described this event as a 'battle', while another (*The Herald*) described it as 'disorder', implies that the two were telling altogether different stories.

The traditional 'us and them' pattern, of the indigenous population versus asylum seekers, appeared quite frequently. A variation on it was 'us', the tax-payers, versus 'them', the government. These patterns appeared most frequently in the *Scottish Daily Express* and the *Scottish Daily Mail*, and to a slightly lesser extent in the *Scottish Sun*. *The Herald's* piece questioning whether Dungavel Removal Centre should be shut down was perhaps the only

time that refugees and asylum seekers were seen as part of the 'us' group, along with other members of the Scottish public.

In general, the purely Scottish newspapers in the sample had a neutral to favourable stance on asylum, and tended to believe that asylum seekers should be treated with respect and dignity. The picture presented by the Scottish editions of UK-wide papers, however, was not so positive. Of the UK-wide papers that have Scottish editions, the most pro-asylum was the *Scottish Daily Mirror*, which is relatively well differentiated for a Scottish audience. This is considerably less the case for the *Scottish Daily Mail*, the *Scottish Daily Express*, and the *Scottish Sun*.

Nonetheless, this analysis indicates that arguably, while there is a considerable amount of negative coverage of asylum issues in the Scottish press, there is also supportive coverage carried by some Scottish papers, particularly with regard to Dungavel Removal Centre, suggests that the situation has improved since the previous studies were carried out.

However, some of the shortcomings highlighted by previous reports were still apparent in the sample analysed here — particularly the failure to provide a context for stories about asylum, the use of misleading or inaccurate terminology, and the creation of stereotypical 'us and them' patterns. Some papers have a tendency to present asylum stories as evidence for the failure of government policy, using events and statistics as a means of political point scoring. Not only does asylum come to be viewed as a political issue rather than as a humanitarian one: individual asylum seekers themselves get 'lost' in the debate.

1. CONTEXT

Previous research on asylum and the media

This study aims to build on an existing body of work that has attempted to analyse questions concerning the way asylum is reported in the media, and how this can affect people's lives.

In 2001, Oxfam published 'Asylum: The Truth Behind the Headlines', an analysis of the Scottish press, which looked at the way it presented asylum issues. The research found that press coverage during the period monitored was negative to the point of being hostile.

Debate was often characterised by the propagation of myths and by overtly negative language, and focused primarily on costs and numbers, rather than on people.

Oxfam supported a similar study in Wales in 2001: 'Welcome or Over-Reaction?: Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Welsh Media', published by the Asylum Seekers and Refugees Media Group (the 'Welsh Media Group'). This showed that the Welsh press tended to cover issues of asylum without hostility, but that debate there focused on the 'management' of asylum rather than on its causes. Both these reports were undertaken at a time when asylum seekers were beginning to be dispersed throughout the UK, following the 1999 Immigration and Asylum Act. Since then, asylum has continued to be a topic of intense media interest, and continues to be framed as a highly politicised issue, emerging time and again as a key issue for political parties in their election campaigns.

The continued high profile of asylum in the news, and frequent complaints about the accuracy and quality of the way it is reported, led the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) in 2003 to issue guidance that warned against the use of inaccurate terms such as 'illegal asylum seeker', which risked generating 'an atmosphere of fear and hostility'. A year later the PCC, alerted to the fact that such terms were still to be found in newspaper coverage, commissioned a blanket scan of all UK newspapers for the term 'illegal asylum seeker' and

began notifying editors of transgressions in this area. This is a welcome measure in terms of encouraging accuracy in reporting.

More recently, two further reports have examined the way that issues of asylum are reported in the media. These are 'What's the Story?: Results from Research into Media Coverage of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK', published by Article 19 (the Global Campaign for Free Expression) in 2003; and 'Media Image, Community Impact', published by the Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees in the UK (ICAR) in 2004. Although the specific issues under examination differ from study to study, there are some notable similarities in their general findings. All found that a lack of context, a limited range of sources, and the use of stereotypical images contributed to a general lack of complexity in reporting.

Terminology

Article 19 and ICAR both found that newspapers tended to use basic terminology incorrectly — for example, 'asylum seeker' and 'refugee' were often used interchangeably. In addition, Article 19 found examples of meaningless or contradictory terms, such as 'illegal refugee' (a persons right to cross international borders to seek protection is set out in international legislation) The Welsh Media Group found that two major themes running through the terminology used were fear of asylum seekers and asylum seekers as a burden on society. Although certain quoted sources (mainly political) challenged the issue of fear, the existence of a perceived link between asylum seekers and crime tended to cancel this out and reinforce an 'us and them' pattern.

Categorisation of asylum seekers and others

All of the studies found a failure to distinguish between issues of immigration and issues of asylum, including a failure to distinguish between asylum seekers and economic migrants.

This in turn tended to reinforce the myth that most asylum seekers come from 'safe' countries and are therefore 'bogus'. Nevertheless, the Welsh Media Group found that the direct opposition of 'real' versus 'fake' asylum seekers was not often used. Both the Welsh Media Group and Article 19, however, pointed out that there was a general lack of context in reporting: links were not made between stories of human rights abuses, civil war, and political chaos on the one hand and the domestic situation as regards asylum seekers on the other.

The Welsh Media Group found that there was little categorisation of asylum seekers by nationality, i.e. the focus tended to be on asylum as an 'official' issue that the government and local authorities had to 'manage', as opposed to a humanitarian issue that was given any form of context — for example, by discussing conditions in the countries from which asylum seekers came.

Oxfam 2001 found evidence of asylum seekers being differentiated by nationality, but with the result that certain nationalities became 'demonised'. Differentiating between nationalities might be seen as a positive thing, but only if it is done with the intention of providing individual asylum seekers with more complex identities — rather than leading to a situation where some asylum seekers are looked upon more positively purely because others are seen more negatively.

Use of photographs

The Welsh Media Group found that very few of the photographs used with articles were of asylum seekers themselves; they tended instead to be of government officials and other related parties. Article 19 found more photographs of asylum seekers, but these tended to be of young, single men and thus reinforced the stereotype of the asylum seeker as a threatening young male. However, several of the studies made the point that asylum

seekers are relatively unwilling to be photographed, due to concerns about danger in their home country and/or in the area in which they live now. The previous use of negative imagery has only made this worse.

Numbers

The Welsh Media Group found that the majority of articles in the press described asylum seekers either in terms of their numbers or of the claimed cost to the UK of their presence. Article 19 found that the generally negative tone of the coverage was exaggerated by the fact that articles focused overwhelmingly on numbers, and that these were taken out of context. Oxfam 2001 found that numbers were misused, and also commented on the use of negative words such as 'flood' and 'wave', which suggest large numbers of people and have threatening connotations. ICAR found that 'influxes' of refugees were one of the main themes arising in the articles in its research.

Cost

Oxfam 2001 found there was a great deal of focus on the economic cost to the UK of asylum seekers. Some papers claimed that asylum seekers were receiving more generous benefits than UK claimants. Comparisons were frequently made between the amount of money allegedly being spent on asylum seekers and what that money could pay for in a different context, rather than discussing the government's relative failure in dealing with UK poverty as an issue in itself. This type of coverage could potentially encourage British residents to blame asylum seekers for the severity of their own situation. Overall, Oxfam 2001 found that, while there was much focus on what asylum seekers 'take' from society, there was no discussion of what they could potentially give (the possibility of gaining permission to work was revoked in 2002, a year after this report was published).

Although ICAR did not list the topic of economic cost as one of its main findings, it did find that many stories focused on crime, thus continuing the theme of asylum seekers 'taking' from society. ICAR found evidence of government officials challenging the incorrect use of terminology (as did the Welsh Media Group), but noted that this was cancelled out by the links frequently made by newspapers between asylum and crime.

Choice of sources

All four of the reports highlighted the fact that the majority of sources quoted in articles were politicians, other officials, or police representatives. The Welsh Media Group and Oxfam 2001 noted that this tended to frame stories from a political perspective, thus presenting asylum as a social problem rather than as a human rights or humanitarian issue. Oxfam 2001 and ICAR pointed out that the politicians quoted tended to be from the main parties, further highlighting the political angle.

When it came to letters pages, Oxfam 2001 made the point that in general letters chosen for publication tended to reflect the newspaper's policy on asylum, thus appearing to reinforce its own claims.

The current study

Oxfam established the Asylum Positive Images Project in May 2004. The overall aim of the project was to contribute to a public climate in Scotland where people seeking asylum are supported, to help them integrate successfully into society. In particular, the project sought to measure public and political attitudes towards asylum and to monitor the Scottish print media's reporting of the subject. To this end, it undertook a period of media monitoring during July–October 2004 and engaged Dr. Anthea Irwin of the Division of Media, Culture and Leisure Management at Glasgow Caledonian University to provide an analysis of the themes contained in the reports it had collated.

At the same time, the project commissioned a MORI Scotland poll to gauge public opinions on asylum: It also surveyed eighty-nine people who were seeking asylum in Glasgow at that time. A questionnaire was distributed via drop-in centres and information services throughout the city, asking asylum seekers for their comments or thoughts on media coverage of asylum issues. Their voices are included within this report. A steering group made up of key stakeholders was established to guide the work of the project, with the aim of establishing a network to investigate the topic of asylum in the media.

'I think most of the racial problems we have as asylum seekers are caused and encouraged by the media.' — Woman seeking asylum from Rwanda

The recent MORI Scotland poll of the general public found that 98 per cent of Scots received their information about asylum from the media. However, half of those polled did not think that reporting of the issue was fair. The same poll revealed mixed views about asylum. Although two-thirds of those polled (64 per cent) thought that Scotland should provide a safe haven for people fleeing war and persecution, almost half (46 per cent) also expressed concerns about the number of asylum seekers living in Scotland.

Respondents generally did not identify asylum seekers as being able to make a positive contribution to life in Scotland, only 28% agreeing that they could but four in five people (83 per cent) believed that people seeking asylum should be able to undertake paid employment. Sixty per cent did not believe that children should be held in secure accommodation while their family's asylum application was being considered. (Detention, and in particular the Dungavel Removal Centre in South Lanarkshire, which has a family unit, was a recurrent theme in the media monitoring sample.)

Despite mixed public perceptions such as these, the asylum debate continues to be cast negatively in many contexts throughout the media, and this has a tangible impact on the

lives of people seeking asylum in the UK. 'Understanding Prejudice' a recent report by Stonewall found that asylum seekers were the group against whom the most open and blatant expressions of prejudice, and often anger, were directed. The report identified newspapers and television as the key influences in engendering prejudice against asylum seekers. No other form of prejudice against any other group was identified as being directly influenced in this way.

Instead of being viewed as a humanitarian issue — where there is an international obligation to protect people seeking asylum and to help them rebuild their lives safely within communities — the media debate on asylum has become increasingly negative, with stereotypes being used to characterise people seeking asylum and a narrow focus on questions of numbers and costs. Asylum seekers have been labelled 'illegal', 'parasites', and 'scroungers', while the predominant stereotype in the press is that of the 'threatening young male'. The impact of this kind of portrayal is debilitating, and asylum seekers have reported that negative media coverage has a direct, sometimes violent impact on their lives.

When media reports are analysed, certain themes recur, although they may be subject to regional variance or variation over time. Crime, cost to the taxpayer, and the alleged shortcomings of Government policy on asylum are among the most prominent of these. Generally, there appears to be a failure to put the asylum debate into its wider context, while reporting is often over-simplified and there is little diversity in the range of views represented. Newspapers tend to rely on politicians for their sources while the voices of people seeking asylum often go unheard — in fact, those of individual asylum seekers seem to get lost within the asylum debate altogether.

This report contributes to a growing body of work that scrutinises the debate on asylum, as it is seen through the eyes of the media in the UK. The research provides a baseline of information that is uniquely Scottish in context and investigates the key messages

generated through the reporting of asylum, to provide a contextual understanding of what exactly we are reading about when newspapers cover asylum issues. The report contributes to a wider body of work responding to concerns about media reporting of asylum and the detrimental impact this often has, both on people seeking asylum and on wider issues of community cohesion.

'The media should take into account the real cause of war in Africa and why people flee from Africa. The media are changing the meaning of the asylum issue.' — Woman from Congo

2. ANALYSIS OF CONTENT

Methodology

During a three-month monitoring period, from 19 July 2004 to 19 October 2004, the Asylum Positive Images Project collated all articles appearing in the Scottish print media that were concerned with refugees and people seeking asylum in a UK context. The newspapers monitored (each day, excluding Saturdays) were *The Press and Journal*, *The Herald*, the *Dundee Courier*, *The Scotsman*, the *Daily Record*, the *Glasgow Evening Times*, the *Scottish Sun*, the *Scottish Daily Mail*, the *Scottish Daily Mirror*, and the *Scottish Daily Express*. Three Sunday newspapers were monitored: the *Sunday Herald*, the *Sunday Mail*, and *Scotland on Sunday*.¹

Each article found was broken down to enable an analysis of trends. Articles were classified under one of the following headings: news, features, letters, front page, editorial, or opinion pieces. The focus of each article was then identified as being either Scotland-wide, UK-wide, or international. Any article classified as international had to include a UK dimension, for example we did not code coverage of the Refugee crisis in Sudan, but we would code internationally set stories if they also discussed an aspect of UK policy or arrival in the UK. This would help in establishing whether or not the Scottish print media had a similar agenda to its English counterpart.

Keywords in headlines and broad themes were also identified to enable an analysis of what was likely to draw a reader's attention to an article, what headline words set the agenda, and also what (in broad-brush terms) the article was actually about. Labels used to describe

¹ On 19 July the *Scottish Sun* and *Scottish Daily Mirror* were not monitored. On 27 July no Sunday papers were monitored.

people within articles about asylum were also identified, and if an article was accompanied by an image, this was recorded.

All the articles were collated and forwarded to Dr. Anthea Irwin of Glasgow Caledonian University. Dr. Irwin reviewed all the articles and identified certain sets of stories from which a critical discourse analysis could be constructed.

Discourse analysis

The three main themes that emerged from analysis of the contents and coverage of the articles were crime, detention, and government policy. The type of analysis of these undertaken can broadly be described as 'discourse analysis'. This compares and contrasts articles that have been written about the same basic issue or event, and considers the implications of different choices of language, image, structure, and layout — both for the readers' understanding of what has happened in a particular case and for perceptions of asylum in general.

The comparative nature of this type of analysis lends itself to a 'case study' approach, which here focuses on certain events or linked series of events that generated the greatest coverage in the sample. A number of other sub-themes are also highlighted. The methodology is informed by the work of a range of discourse analysts and social theorists, as outlined below.

Issues of structure

The work of Allan Bell is particularly useful to a study such as this: he is a respected academic in the field of discourse analysis who was also, for much of his working life, a journalist, and therefore 'has a foot in both camps'. He is able to view texts critically while recognising the practicalities of life in a busy newsroom, such as the pressures of deadlines

and issues of 'saleability'. Of particular usefulness is his work on 'news values' and the discourse structure of news stories.

'News values' are an abstract set of values to which journalists tend to adhere: they affect what appears in the paper, where it appears, and which aspects of the event are highlighted in the story. Bell points out that news stories are rarely presented chronologically: they tend to begin with the most recent event and then fill in the background. Certain aspects of an event will be highlighted to make the story more readable or 'saleable', one of the most obvious of which is 'recency'. Bell points out that this sometimes obscures the clarity of cause and effect in a story. He suggests, therefore, that it is useful to consider the relationship between a headline, sub headline and the lead sentence of an article, and that between the lead sentence and the rest of the story, and to consider whether the relationship between headline, sub headline and lead sentence are reflective of the article as a whole.

This is important if we think about how people 'get their news' from newspapers. Readers do not in general read a paper from cover to cover in the way they would a book. They are more likely to look at the front page first (possibly preceded by the back page if they follow sport), then look at the headlines throughout the paper, and then choose specific articles that attract their attention. From the newspaper's point of view, it is essential that the relationship between headline, sub headline and the lead sentence reflect the main point of the article, as these may be the only elements that readers consider. People may see front-page headlines without ever buying the paper, for example when browsing in a newsagent's shop or passing a billboard outside.

Issues of explicitness

Norman Fairclough too points out that choices are made when writing news articles. One of the main choices is that between presence and absence: i.e. it may be the case that only certain aspects of an event are mentioned in any one article that is written about it. There are also 'degrees of presence', with different aspects highlighted to a greater or lesser extent: they can be foregrounded, backgrounded, or pre-supposed (i.e. not mentioned explicitly but implied by other information). Even before we begin to consider specific use of language, it is important to consider *what* is there, *where* it is, and *how explicitly* it is stated.

Use of language

Roger Fowler makes some interesting points about choices of language and word order and their implications for how we understand the event being described. He points out potential lexical variations in the way individuals and groups are labelled. Certain words, though practically synonymous in terms of their dictionary definitions, have very different connotations and colour the degree to which readers feel empathy (or otherwise) with those who are being described. One well-known example is 'terrorist' versus 'freedom fighter'.

It is also important to think about how syntax can affect the way in which something is read. For example, does the event appear in an active or a passive construction? Saying 'A shot B' potentially has a different effect from saying 'B was shot by A', even more so as this can be shortened to 'B was shot', thus removing responsibility for the action entirely. The verb 'to shoot' can even be nominalised so that the sentence becomes 'There was a shooting'. In the context of this study, it was important to look at who was doing what to whom, which groups and individuals were portrayed as active or passive, and to consider the connotations attached to various actions that were undertaken.

‘Us and them’

There is often a pattern of ‘us and them’ in newspaper reporting. This is particularly the case when issues of conflict are reported, but it can also appear for other issues. The reader can be included in a powerful ‘us’ group and therefore be encouraged to view the ‘other’ group more negatively. Teun Van Dijk, like some of the other analysts mentioned here, focuses on labelling and connotation and also outlines a model that he calls ‘the ideological square’. This considers whether the actions of each group are reported evenly, or whether there is evidence of good actions being highlighted and bad ones mitigated for the ‘us’ group, and vice versa for the ‘them’ group. It was important for this study to consider whether the indigenous UK population on the one hand, and asylum seekers on the other, were being placed in ‘us’ or ‘them’ groups and, if so, how this encouraged or discouraged the former in terms of sympathising with the latter.

Dominance and deviance

Michel Foucault saw power and knowledge as two sides of the same coin. The more knowledge a person has, the more powerful they are likely to become; and the more powerful someone is, the more likely it is that their knowledge will be viewed as valid. The knowledge of those who hold power becomes ‘dominant’, is likely to be taken for granted and, by extension, gains the status of ‘truth’. Foucault terms this ‘dominant discourse’; by definition, it creates categories of ‘deviants’, who are seen as being in opposition to ‘the norm’. It is interesting to note that although a ‘dominant discourse’ does not need to be believed or trusted by everyone, it is the ‘voice’ that is most often heard.

Foucault’s work is relevant to this study because the press presents us with ‘knowledge’ on a daily basis, with different publications vying for their knowledge to be accepted as truth, or ‘dominant discourse’. What constitutes ‘truth’ in relation to asylum is a highly contested issue, and positions vary greatly between newspapers on questions such as who should be

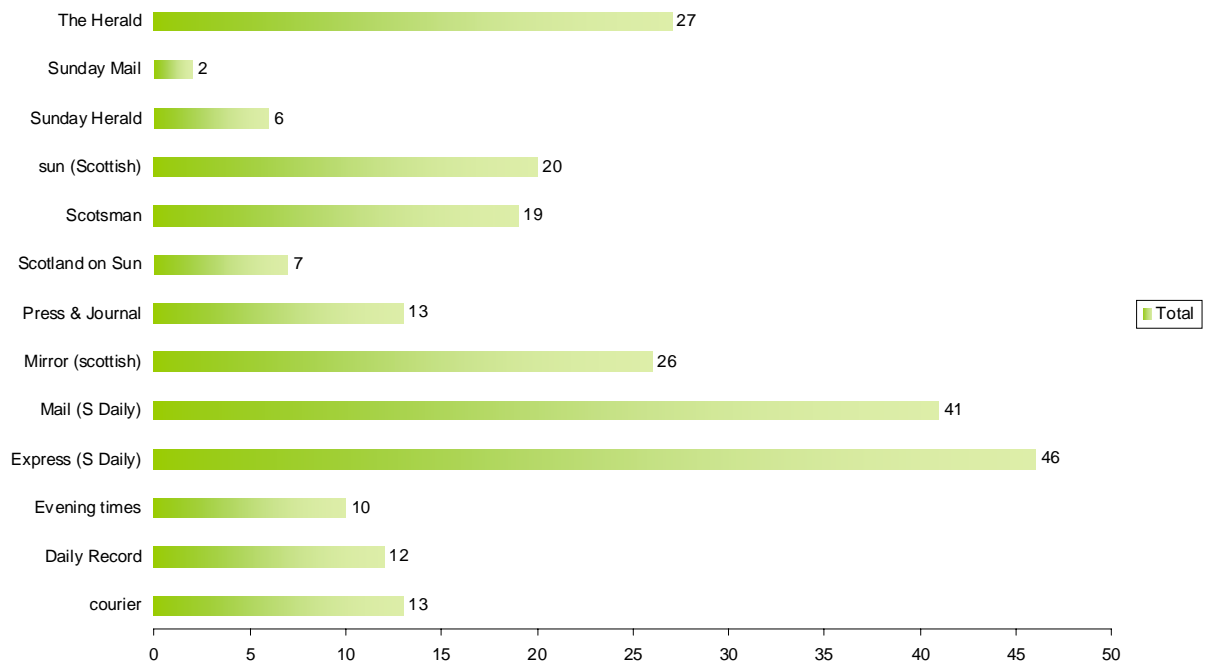
considered 'deviant': asylum seekers themselves, or those who develop policies to 'deal' with them.

Asylum in the newspapers

In total, 242 articles on asylum appeared in the Scottish press during the period of monitoring — on average three a day over the 80 days monitored. The *Scottish Daily Express* carried a total of 46 of the articles coded, or 19 per cent of the total. The *Scottish Daily Mail* had 41 articles, or 17 per cent of all coded articles. These two newspapers, which between them accounted for 36 per cent of the total coverage, are Scottish editions of English-based media.

The Herald, the *Scottish Daily Mirror*, the *Scottish Sun* and *The Scotsman* also all carried a significant number of articles on asylum. The *Daily Record*, the biggest-selling national tabloid in Scotland, wrote relatively little about the topic, contributing only 5 per cent of all articles, a similar proportion to that of the broadsheets that cover the north of Scotland, the *Dundee Courier* and *The Press and Journal*. The Glasgow-based local paper the *Glasgow Evening Times* carried the smallest number of stories about asylum of all the dailies monitored. However, at least some articles on asylum were found in all of the newspapers in the sample period.

asylum in the newspapers

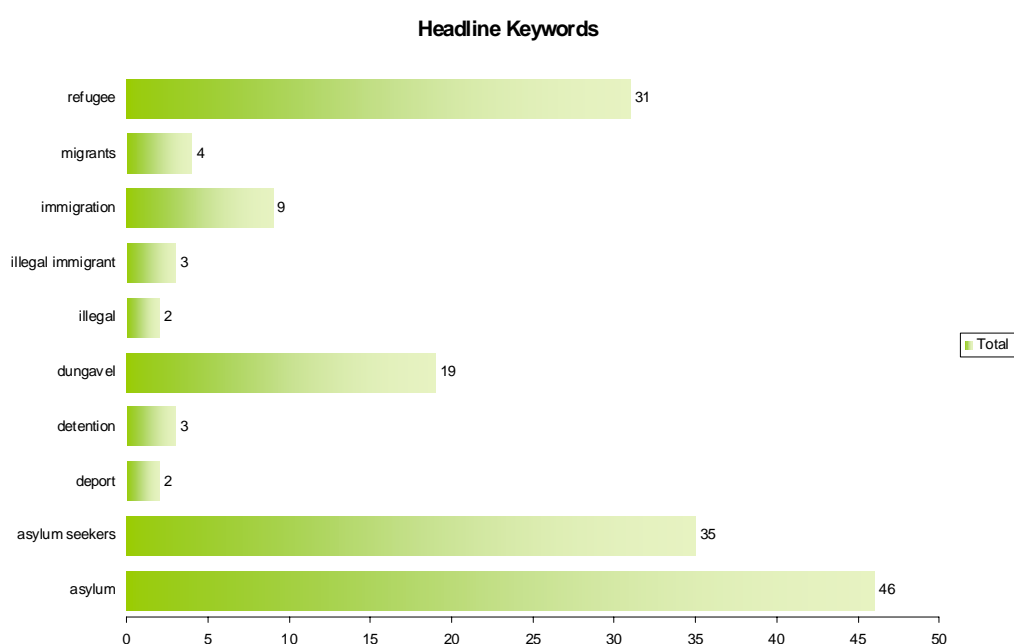


Of the 242 articles that appeared over the three-month period, 213 were assessed for focus (excluding letters pages). News originating from Scotland or affecting people living in Scotland accounted for 46 per cent of all coverage, indicating that, for the most part, Scottish newspapers are distinct from English-based print media in their reporting of asylum. Only six articles were coded as having an international focus. These reported, for example, on proposals for ‘transit’ or ‘processing’ centres, or referred to routes of entry to the UK or to factors that deterred people from coming to the UK.

News stories were the predominant type of article, accounting for 69 per cent of all the articles found. Sixty-one per cent of all articles were written by a named reporter or member(s) of a newspaper’s editorial team. This is significant as it makes readers feel they have a ‘point of contact’ with the newspaper, and that they can interact with it to some degree.

In analysing headlines, a number of words were coded as keywords; some 60 per cent of all the articles coded contained one of these keywords in its headline. The predominant keywords were 'asylum', 'asylum seeker(s)', and 'refugee(s)', but interestingly 'Dungavel' (the name of a detention/removal centre in Scotland) was the fourth most common. A whole array of emotive language could be found linked to the word 'asylum' in headlines, with common pairings including 'asylum farce', 'asylum fiasco', and 'asylum chaos'.

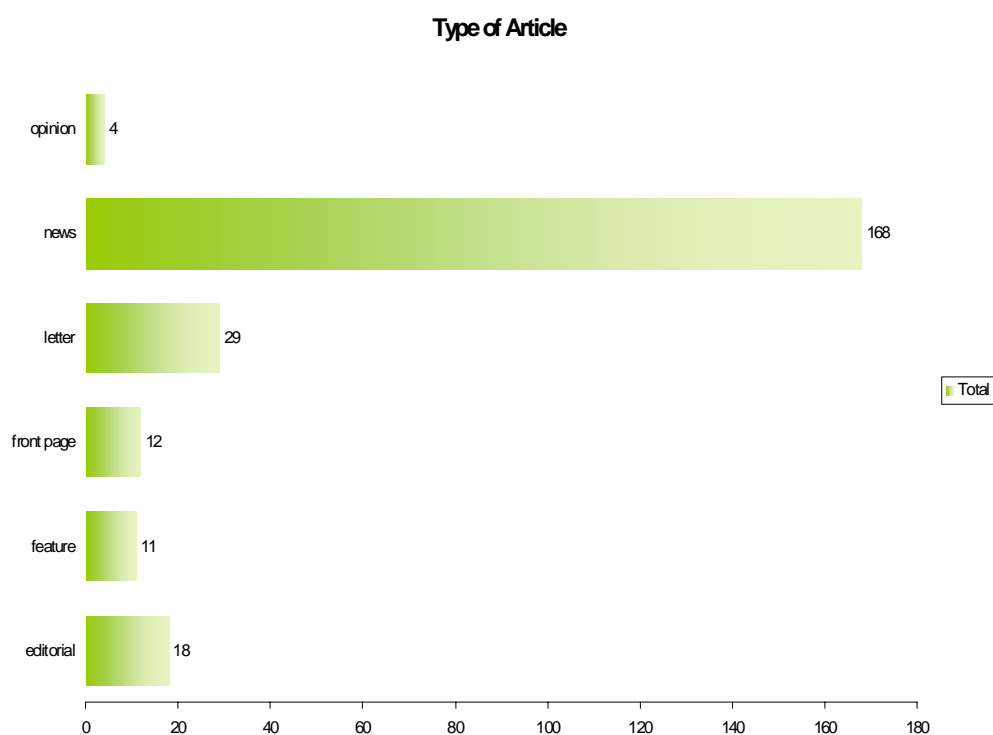
Asylum made the front page 12 times during the monitoring period. The *Scottish Daily Express* and the *Scottish Daily Mail* each placed it there three times. *The Herald* put asylum on its front page on two occasions and the *Dundee Courier*, the *Scottish Daily Mirror*, *Scotland on Sunday*, and the *Sunday Mail* on one occasion apiece. Five of the papers carried editorials about asylum during the monitoring period.



'Reporting is often negative; articles should be explained more factually and not with sweeping statements that incite dislike from others.' —
Woman from Congo

Letters from readers accounted for 12 per cent of all coverage. Letters pages expressed a variety of opinions regarding policy, detention, and costs (relating to asylum policy, health, racism, and employment). Contributors included members of the public, organisations, members of parliament, and on one occasion a person seeking asylum (published in the *Daily Record*).

'The media contains poor information about asylum. They have a role to bring people together and not to separate out asylum seekers as a stereotype. They also have a role to help us settle in the UK.' — Woman seeking asylum from Lebanon



Key themes

In broad brush-stroke terms, the main themes covered by stories in the sample were detention, UK immigration and asylum policy, and crime/illegal activity. The monitoring found few stories about the reasons that drive people to seek asylum in the UK, or about people rebuilding their lives in the UK. Similarly, there were few

articles that profiled positive contributions that people seeking asylum may be able to make to the UK.

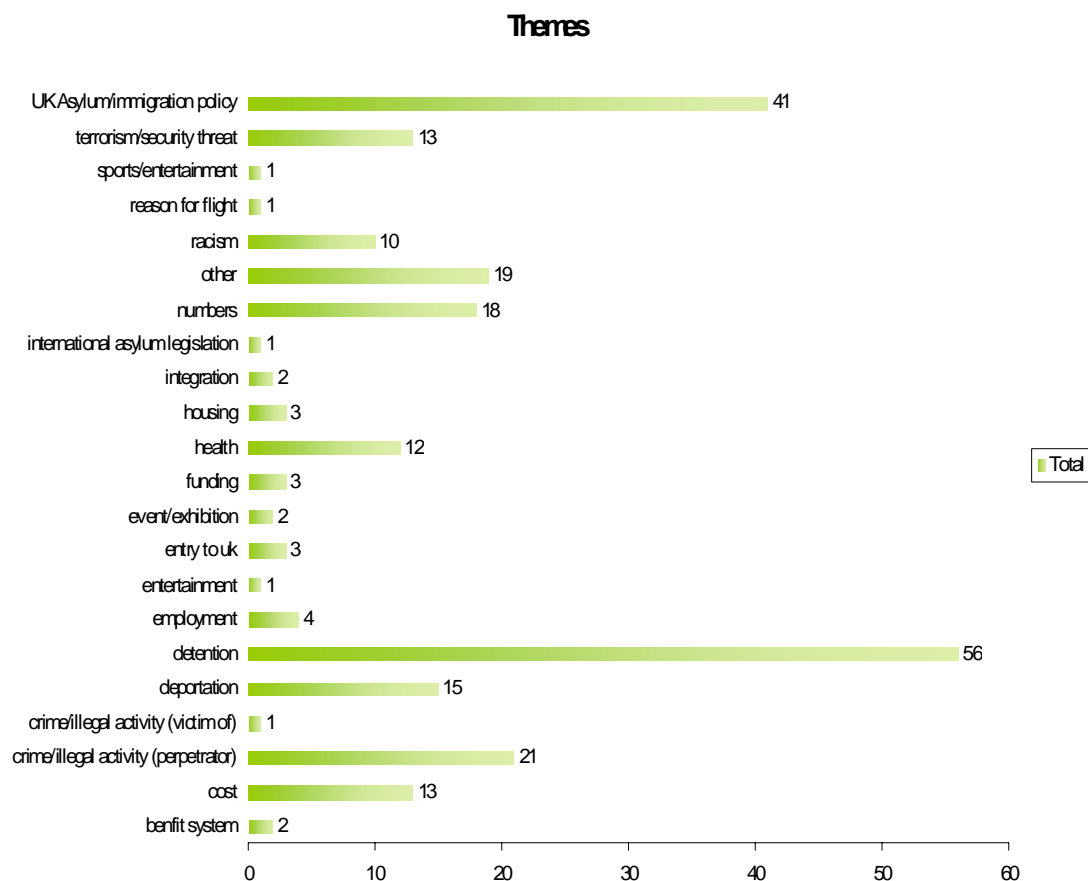
Looking at articles that focused on Scotland, a trend begins to emerge. Stories about detention accounted for 42 per cent of the 98 articles in this category, with the next largest total being reports of crime and illegal activity. When articles were UK-wide in scope, the predominant theme was UK immigration and asylum policy, followed by articles about numbers of asylum seekers, crime or illegal activity, and then detention.

Articles relating to integration, or positive aspects of asylum or events were, as already mentioned, difficult to find. For example, only one story was found that profiled the positive impact of families being reunited after a long period of enforced separation; one detailing the reasons why a person had sought asylum in the UK; and a handful of articles about initiatives or events towards which people seeking asylum had contributed positively. All of the articles identified under these themes had a Scottish focus.

'There is never anything good in the newspapers about asylum seekers.' —
Woman from Burundi

When the *Scottish Daily Mirror* and *The Herald* wrote about asylum, it was predominantly about detention. In fact, 55 per cent of all articles on asylum in *The Herald* and 42 per cent in the *Mirror* had detention as their broad theme. Both these papers showed evidence of sympathetic coverage of the impact that detention has on people seeking asylum. In addition, both regularly and actively criticised the practice of detaining asylum seekers, and could be viewed as taking a campaigning role on this point.

Articles about the ‘cost’ of asylum and statistically based stories about numbers of people seeking asylum were predominantly found in the *Scottish Daily Mail* and the *Scottish Daily Express*. Between them, these two papers accounted for 54 per cent of all articles on this theme. However, both also covered a wide spectrum of other themes relating to asylum, and the main theme for both papers was UK immigration and asylum policy.



Labels

Articles used a number of labels to introduce people seeking asylum to the reader. By far the most common label was ‘asylum seeker’, which was found in 107 articles;

this was followed by individuals being referred to by name, the term 'refugee(s)', and 'failed asylum seekers'.

Many articles used a combination of labels. Problems arise when labels are used interchangeably, without establishing any difference between them. 'Asylum seeker' was most often used interchangeably with 'refugee'. Articles using the label 'failed asylum seeker(s)' most often used it interchangeably with 'illegal immigrants', 'illegal migrants', 'economic migrants', 'illegal entrants', and 'immigration detainees'. The use of the term 'bogus asylum seeker(s)' or 'bogus refugee(s)' was not significantly evident during this period of monitoring, but was found in a handful of articles.

There were also discrepancies in the use of the term 'refugee'. On a number of occasions, the term appears to have been used in an attempt to frame the subject of the article more positively. Although in such cases the legal definition of refugee status is often not recorded accurately, the term does at least appear to be used in a generic sense to convey a meaning of flight and/or persecution.

Image and voice

Of the 191 news and feature articles, 158 relied on a named primary source. By far the most prominent voices, accounting for 35 per cent of the total, were those of politicians, who appeared to be driving the media debate on asylum. They included an assortment of official spokespeople from central government and political parties, as well as individual politicians. In addition, political voices were quoted as secondary sources in a further 38 articles.

People from the main legal professions were the next biggest voice, being the primary source in 19 articles. They were followed by refugees themselves, who provided the main voice in 17 articles and were quoted in another four articles.

Think tanks (primarily Migration Watch) and voluntary organisations contributed to the debate in equal proportion, being the main voice in 10 articles apiece. These contrasting groups were also quoted in an additional six and three articles respectively. Non-government organisations (NGOs) from the refugee sector were quoted in four articles as secondary contributors.

When articles were broken down in terms of Scottish focus or UK-wide focus, some differences in the use of primary and secondary sources became apparent. The voices most heard in the Scottish media still came from the political arena, but there was more evidence of individual Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) speaking to the press than was evident for the UK as a whole, where debate appears to be dominated by central government spokespeople. Professional and legal voices were again the second most prominent group.

However, a number of campaigning voices could be heard in articles that focused on Scotland, with notable contributors including the Children's Commissioner Kathleen Marshall, trades unions, groups such as Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees, and even on some occasions campaigning celebrities such as actors. The voluntary sector, most notably Positive Action in Housing, was also present, and there were contributions from the British Red Cross, the Scottish Human Rights Centre, and Oxfam.

Refugee voices were the predominant ones in 9 per cent of articles that had a Scottish focus, and contributed quotes to a further four articles. NGOs, working

primarily with refugees and people seeking asylum, refugee community organisations, and community-based support groups were present in four articles in total, all of which were Scottish in focus. Where a refugee perspective was present in an article, the focus of the story was either detention or deportation. There was little evidence, however, of a refugee perspective contributing positive messages about people rebuilding their lives

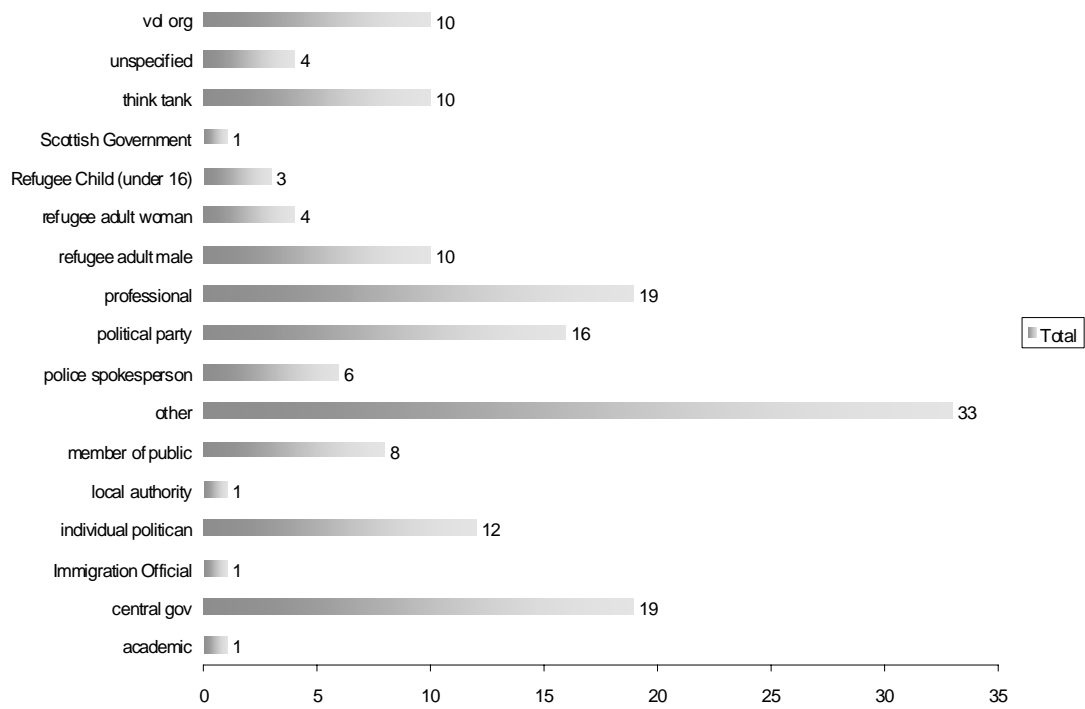
'The media have a responsibility to keep the public informed of current issues and hold the government to account on our behalf, but the tabloids move from story to story and fan hatred through misinformation. They inform us of the opinions that fit the agenda of the news barons, but not necessarily of what is right or wrong. For example, asylum seekers are often portrayed as causing havoc within society and creating a financial loss to the government — but they are rarely portrayed as enriching society.' — Man seeking asylum from Iran

Photographs

Photographs were used to illustrate 91 articles, many of which dealt with detention. The most common type of image — used to illustrate 24 articles — was one depicting refugee men, in a variety of settings and circumstances. Pictures of politicians formed the next largest group, followed by photographs used to illustrate articles on crime, which focused on depictions of victims, their families, and the accused. There were also numerous photographs of Dungavel Removal Centre, or of events in its vicinity.

Photographs of refugee children accompanied eight articles, though only two photographs of refugee women were present. A variety of other photographs, including pictures of reporters, campaigning celebrities, and various locations around the UK, was also used to illustrate articles.

Who is speaking in the Media?



THE MAIN THEMES

While carrying out this research, three main themes emerged: crime, detention, and government policy (in particular the 'numbers debate'), each of which is examined in greater detail below. The prevalence of these themes, as well as the ways in which they have been covered by various newspapers in the study, suggest that, while some of the points highlighted by other researchers have improved over time, others are still very much a cause for concern.

Detention and Dungavel

"Riot then, lets be having you" **Mirror 22/7/04**

This section looks in detail at the reporting of a chain of events involving Dungavel Removal Centre near Strathaven in South Lanarkshire, which occurred in late July 2004. Dungavel is the only removal centre in Scotland (detention centres were redesignated 'removal centres' by the UK government in 2003). The bare outline of the events is as follows: a detainee at the Harmondsworth removal centre outside London committed suicide, which provoked a disturbance among fellow detainees. As a result, a number of detainees were moved to Dungavel, and a few days later one of them committed suicide there. Other detainees were then moved onwards from Dungavel. As we shall see, there are significant variations in the way the different newspapers portray the relationships of cause and effect between these events.

The newspapers in the sample carried a number of other articles about Dungavel and the issue of detention in general. These included some on the issue of suicidal detainees being moved to mainstream prisons, continuing the debate around the two

suicides covered here. The rest tended to focus on the question of whether Dungavel should remain open or not. Some papers, such as *The Herald* and the *Scottish Daily Mirror*, openly campaign for it to be shut down. As might be expected, those that tend to be pro-asylum and anti-Dungavel covered the demonstration that took place after the second suicide in more detail than other papers. Although coverage of this demonstration is not covered in this analysis, demonstrations were held in reaction to the suicides outside detention centres and it is interesting to note where the different papers placed their coverage of the protests in relation to the other coverage focussing on detention.

Coverage was more even when it came to the question of children being held at removal centres. A number of papers that would not generally be viewed as pro-asylum carried very sympathetic articles about a young asylum seeker from Mongolia and her family, who were being detained and who were likely to be deported back to their home country. Even then, however, the papers covered the story in an emotive and highly personal way, focusing on the fact that the young girl had been a gala princess while living in Liverpool. This had the effect of depoliticising the issue and taking the focus away from the situation of adults in detention.

Suicide and violence at Harmondsworth

This story was widely covered and, as might be expected, the language used to describe it varied significantly from paper to paper. However, there were also notable variations in the way the events were presented (particularly of the order in which they occurred), leading to significant differences in the interpretation of cause and effect.

The *Glasgow Evening Times* was the only paper in the sample to carry the story on Tuesday 20 July. It appeared at the top of page six, under a headline that read: 'Riot

after asylum seeker's death'. Significantly, this is the only headline that included any reference to the suicide itself and thus suggests a link between the death and the violence that followed. Even so, the word 'death' is used, rather than 'suicide' (this may have been because the full facts of the case had not yet been released by the police, although the next day some of the other papers referred to a 'suicide' in the text of their articles). The Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers, is quoted as saying that Harmondsworth was 'failing to provide a safe and stable environment' and that 'this was reflected in increasing levels of disorder, damage and escape attempts'. The implication is that these problems could have been to blame for the suicide.

The *Evening Times* continued the story on Wednesday 21 July, in its 'Britain today' section on page four, under the headline '16 in asylum riot quiz'. The lead sentence reads: 'Sixteen men are today being quizzed by police about riots that rocked a refugee centre'. There are several points here that set the *Evening Times*'s approach apart from that of the other papers. Firstly, the situation is referred to as a 'quiz'. This suggests there are unanswered questions about the events that took place and does not, as some of the other papers do, immediately suggest guilt on the part of the asylum seekers. Secondly, the *Evening Times* is the only paper to call the asylum seekers 'men' — a simple label, perhaps, but one that allows for the fact that their identities are more complex than simply being 'asylum seekers', and that they may have shown an emotional, human reaction to the death of a fellow detainee.

Thirdly, Harmondsworth is referred to relatively sympathetically as a 'refugee centre' rather than, for example, a 'detention centre' for 'failed asylum seekers'. Fourthly, the grammatical construction of the phrase 'riots that rocked a refugee centre' puts the noun 'riot' in the position of agent and avoids use of the verb 'to riot', which might suggest that the asylum seekers were at fault.

The Herald carried the story on 21 July, on the bottom half of page four. The headline reads: 'Arrests after violence at detention centre'. Although the suicide is mentioned in the article itself, it is not mentioned in the headline. As in the *Evening Times*, it is referred to as a 'death' rather than a 'suicide', removing the implication of a link with detention conditions. It is alluded to at the end of a sentence that focuses on the prison officers' handling of the situation: 'The tornado unit, a squad of prison officers with a formidable reputation for swiftly bringing control back into the hands of the authorities, was deployed early yesterday to quell the disorder which broke out within hours of the death'. This sentence is representative of the story as a whole — and of journalistic practice in general, in that it works backwards in time.

The Press and Journal also carried the story on 21 July, placing it at the top of page five with the headline 'Arrests at asylum-seeker centre after violence erupts'. The word 'erupts' suggests that the violence was extreme and that, like a volcano, it may have had no immediately apparent cause. The article is accompanied by a photograph captioned: 'A night of violence', although the picture itself does not show anyone being violent: it appears to be a picture of asylum seekers on a bus waiting to be moved.

The Scotsman carried the story on the same day, in its 'Snapshots' section on page eight. The headline reads: 'Asylum arrests' but does not include reference either to the suicide or to the fact that the events took place at an asylum detention centre. The story gives the number of arrests as sixteen. The *Dundee Courier* also carried the story on 21 July, at the bottom of page ten. The headline reads: 'Four arrests after holding centre riot' — a number at odds with that quoted by *The Scotsman* and other papers. The *Courier* is a paper that generally covers asylum stories in a

relatively neutral way, but here it chose to use the word 'riot' rather than 'violence', suggesting a larger scale of disturbance.

The *Scottish Daily Express*, which also put the number of arrests at sixteen, devoted the whole of its page three to the story on 21 July. The headline focuses on cost: '£500,000 cost of riot at the asylum "hotel"'. The *Express* also uses the word 'riot' and, for most of the article, deals with the violence itself rather than providing any context of what preceded or followed it. The fact that the word 'hotel' appears in quotation marks suggests that it is taken from a source and, indeed, one of the centre's chaplains, Mr Kehra, is quoted as saying that the conditions at the centre are very favourable. The use of the word 'hotel' — which is arguably not immediately relevant to the story — implies that the detainees had no reason to riot as they were living in such (allegedly) good conditions, and reinforces the negative idea of detainees as trouble-makers.

The pictures that accompany the article are of two detainees who have been handcuffed, two policemen in riot gear and Mr Kehra. 'A suspected suicide' is mentioned in the caption that accompanies the photograph of the police, but is not mentioned in the article itself until the fourth paragraph.

The extent of the violence is built up by the use of war metaphors, e.g.: 'Riot forces fought a 16-hour battle to quell an uprising by asylum seekers yesterday at the UK's leading detention centre'. This creates an 'us and them' situation of asylum seekers versus the police, with the asylum seekers portrayed as a threat to security. It could be argued that this depiction is a false one: as the other papers suggest, the detainees were indeed reacting against something, but not in the first instance against the police. The pattern is reinforced by language such as the following: 'Rapid-response "Tornado unit" prison officers were called in to corner 80 rioting

inmates ...'. 'Cornered' is a word that is often used to refer to the hunting of animals. This could be viewed to dehumanise the asylum seekers involved.

The article ends with quotes from a Home Office spokesperson and from the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Anne Owers. The first reads: 'A Home Office spokeswoman said: "No violence was used on members of staff and no detainees were injured"'. This may just be an imprecise choice of words, but interestingly it does not rule out the possibility that violence was used on the detainees. The quote from Anne Owers alludes to Harmondsworth being 'unsafe'. Apart from the suicide itself, this is the first reference to any factor that could potentially have led to a reaction from the detainees. However, it comes at the very end of the article and it is likely that many readers would not have read this far, instead getting the (rather different) gist of the story from the headline and the first few sentences.

The *Scottish Daily Mail* ran the story on page nine, filling almost the whole of the page. The headline reads: '£5m asylum riot' and the sub-head: '100s of detainees torch detention centre. Yardie ringleaders behind the violence. But will anyone ever face charges?' There are a number of striking differences between the way in which the story is presented here and by other newspapers. For instance, the '100s of detainees' — presented as fact — differs from the 'up to 100' mentioned by *The Herald*. No other newspaper mentions a connection with Yardie criminal gangs, so we would expect evidence for this claim to be given elsewhere in the article, though this is lacking. It seems odd to pose the question, 'But will anyone ever face charges?', given that most of the other papers point out in their headlines that arrests have been made. The *Mail's* suggestion that charges are unlikely to be brought, despite the arrests, is a tenuous one that is perhaps hard to justify in a headline position.

In common with all the other papers (except the *Evening Times*), there is no mention of a death or a suicide in the headline. Instead, the *Mail* focuses on the alleged cost of the 'riot'. It puts this at £5m, a significant inflation of the £500,000 claimed by the *Express*. Focusing on cost (and usually relating it to the burden on individual tax-payers) is a common theme in both the *Express* and the *Mail*.

There are a number of points to note about the rest of the *Mail's* article. For instance, there is a picture of a young black man looking out of a vehicle window, with the caption: 'On the move: a detainee left without accommodation is taken from the badly damaged Harmondsworth centre last night'. To some degree this is sympathetic to the detainee, portraying him as a victim of the violence. Other newspapers, however, portray the same individual as a perpetrator of violence: the *Express* and the *Sun* use photographs that show him in handcuffs. At best, different interpretations of the same (or similar) images by different newspapers reflect how pressures on news and picture desks can lead to inaccuracies or misrepresentation; at worst, they may indicate that readers are being manipulated.

In the body copy, a sentence reads: 'A hardcore of 17 ringleaders — mainly Jamaican nationals — orchestrated the fire-raising and wrecking spree. They are said to have spread rumours that the 31-year-old found hanged in his room had been murdered and his death was linked to that of another man who died at another centre'. Although the article claims that the ringleaders were 'mainly Jamaican nationals', it does not give any concrete numbers regarding the nationalities involved. Furthermore, we have been already told in the headline that 'Yardie ringleaders' are 'behind the violence', which creates an equivalence between 'Jamaican nationals' and 'Yardies'. We are told in addition that they 'are said to have spread rumours ...', but there is no source for this claim, nor is any evidence for it cited.

The next sentence reads: 'As the stories circulated, violence erupted.' Although syntactically this simply states that the two things happened concurrently, the implication is that the violence was caused by the 'stories'. The words 'rumours' and 'stories' imply that the people who said these things were telling lies, and shift the focus from the man who died, and onto them. The word 'orchestrated' further suggests that the asylum seekers themselves were solely responsible for the violence, and deflects attention from the conditions in which they were detained or from any events that might have given them cause to be angry.

This suggestion is backed up by a discussion of conditions at the centre that carries the headline 'Locked up in comfort'. It reads: 'Ignore the razor wire topping the 15ft perimeter fence and the Harmondsworth centre would fit easily into the landscape of any modern business park' (although it could be argued that the difficulty involved in 'ignoring the razor wire' renders the sentence irrelevant).

The *Scottish Sun* also carried the story on 21 July, at the bottom of page 18, with the headline: '16 held over riot at asylum centre'. This concurs with the number of arrests reported by most papers and again uses the word 'riot' rather than the more neutral 'violence'. The article claims that 'at least 150 inmates ran amok', suggesting a higher level of violence even than that of a 'riot'. The numbers alleged to be involved are higher than the *Herald's* 'up to 100', but not as high as the *Mail's* 'hundreds'.

The photograph used in the *Sun* is of the same individual pictured in the *Daily Mail* but, as noted above, the *Sun's* picture shows that he is in handcuffs. The caption reads: 'Under arrest ... a handcuffed detainee is taken from the centre'.

It is not until the third paragraph that we read that the violence occurred after a man died. The *Sun* claims the man was Kosovan; in the *Mail* he is said to be Ukrainian. At

the end of the article, we are told that ‘damage is expected to total tens of thousands of pounds’, though this is presented in the passive voice and no source or evidence is given for the claim. The three papers that focus on cost — the *Sun*, the *Express*, and the *Mail* — differ widely in their estimates of the final bill, and it is notable that none of the three provides any source for the sum it suggests.

The move from Harmondsworth to Dungavel

The *Scottish Daily Mirror* carried a story about a group of asylum seekers being moved from Harmondsworth to Dungavel on Thursday 22 July. The headline reads: ‘Riot then, let’s be having you’ — a pun on the phrase ‘Right then, let’s be having you’, which police officers are traditionally held to utter when arresting people. This phrase conjures up jokey connotations, in contrast to most other papers, which have focussed on the necessity of having a strong police presence to curb the events inside the detention centre. It could be argued that the papers stance is more sympathetic to the asylum seekers involved than others have been.

The lead reads: ‘200 asylum seekers are moved to Dungavel after detention centre battle’ (although other papers put the number moved at 30 and point out that Dungavel has a capacity of only around 150 people, including families). Like the *Express*, the *Mirror* uses the language of war, though the construction of the phrase means that the asylum seekers are not specifically blamed for the incident. The article continues in the same vein, describing Harmondsworth as ‘a riot-hit detention centre’, then referring to it as ‘the controversial former jail’, which implies that there may be reasons for detainees to react against conditions there. The passive construction of another sentence — ‘after [the centre] was torched in a violent disturbance’ — again avoids specifically portraying the detainees as the perpetrators of the violence. The first time they are actively described in this way is in the fourth

paragraph: 'Around 100 detainees caused £5 million of damage at the centre when a Ukrainian man was found hanged.' It is worth noting that, at the point where the detainees are actively described as being violent, it is linked to the suicide, thus implying a cause for the violence.

Sentences such as 'Coach loads of asylum seekers from [Harmondsworth] were secretly shipped to Dungavel' and 'Yesterday morning a convoy of four buses crept through the razor-wire-topped gates of Dungavel detention centre' suggest that the detainees have been moved in a somewhat underhand way. The specific problems involved in moving detainees from a centre in England to one in Scotland are covered at the end of the article. Scottish Socialist Party MSP Rosie Kane is quoted, with reference to the potential problems of overcrowding at Dungavel and the implications for detainees' individual cases of moving to a different legal system.

The Herald continued the story on Friday 23 July, in the middle of page six. The headline reads: 'Detainees taken to Dungavel after riot', while the article expands on the move that takes place 'after violence and riots closed a similar complex near London this week'. In common with the *Mirror's* treatment, the syntax of these phrases includes 'riot' as a stand-alone noun, rather than presenting it as a process that could be blamed on asylum seekers.

Suicide at Dungavel

On Friday 23 July it was reported that a young Vietnamese man, one of the Harmondsworth detainees moved to Dungavel, committed suicide there by hanging himself in a toilet. *The Herald* carried this story on 26 July at the bottom of page one and continuing over to page two. The headline reads: 'Death inquiry to expose Dungavel.' The word 'expose' implies that there are negative things about Dungavel

that are not known to the public (and perhaps may be kept from them). An immediate link is made with events at Harmondsworth, and the death is also placed in the context of other deaths: 'The two deaths in a week bring the number of asylum seekers who have died in UK detention since 1974 to eight. Dungavel, run by Premier Detention Services on behalf of the Home Office, has already had two suicide attempts, but no fatality until now.' Although this is a neutral outlining of facts, the implication is that the situation is worsening. Pointing out the fact that, before this week, there had been only six deaths in the 30 years since 1974, suggests a steep rise. The allusion to other 'suicide attempts' suggests that the figures could potentially be much higher.

The article states that (the then) Home Secretary, David Blunkett, believes conditions in Dungavel to be satisfactory, and comments: 'The announcement astonished Dungavel's many critics, but they may not have to wait long to return fire.' This sets up a new 'us and them' pattern: critics versus the government. The *Mail* and the *Express* place tax-payers against the government but this is different in that, rather than questioning what tax-payers' money should be spent on, it asks whether removal centres should exist at all.

Dungavel is referred to earlier in the article as 'Scotland's only detention centre for asylum seekers' —but that perhaps that one centre should be reduced to none. *The Herald* quotes John Scott, chairman of the Scottish Human Rights Centre, who claims that Dungavel, for which the Home Office is responsible, has not been open to sufficient scrutiny. He also says that the psychiatric welfare of detainees at the centre needs to be looked at: this is a rare instance of the papers in the sample mentioning the potentially negative psychiatric effects of detention on detainees.

The Scotsman carried the story on Monday 26 July, placing it in the top right-hand corner of page two. The headline and lead sentence read: 'Police investigate asylum seeker's suspected suicide', and: 'A police investigation has been launched into the suspected suicide of an asylum seeker who was at a Lanarkshire detention centre'. The focus is on law and order, with the police portrayed as the active party. Dungavel is referred to as 'a Lanarkshire detention centre'; this assumes no prior knowledge of it on the part of readers and suggests that perhaps Dungavel has not been as high up the news agenda for *The Scotsman* as it has been for *The Herald*.

Introducing a number of quotes from campaigners, the article states: 'Campaigners claimed the asylum seeker killed himself after being moved from another asylum centre after a riot', although in fact the quotes themselves focus on the detention rather than the move. This may be due to compression of what the sources said, either by the journalist responsible for the article or the sub-editors who later worked on it, though potentially a decision has been made regarding what information to foreground. While the summary of what was said focussed on the move, the direct quotes focussed on the detention system in general has been taken that was not the one specifically suggested by the sources. For example, one of those quoted is Aamer Anwar, a well-known human rights lawyer who has represented many asylum seekers and who is often used as a source for articles about Dungavel. The first part of what is attributed to him is reported speech ('[Anwar] said the man had been moved from the Harmondsworth detention centre in west London following a serious disturbance last week'), but it continues with a direct quote ('This just shows how barbaric the whole system is, that a young man had taken his own life.'). In this article, *The Scotsman* refers to Anwar as a 'human rights activist' — arguably not the most relevant label to use for him and one that could be seen to lessen the force of the points he makes.

The *Scottish Daily Mirror* also carried the story on 26 July, discussing it in its leader column on page six and placing an article at the top of page 12. The editorial headline reads: 'Asylum shame' and the lead sentence: 'The death of an asylum seeker at Dungavel marks a new low in the history of this vile detention centre.' That Dungavel is high on the *Mirror's* news agenda is highlighted by the fact that it is referred to simply as 'Dungavel', while the words 'new low', suggest that the paper has been marking the various milestones in its history.

The leader declares that prisoners should not be treated like cattle (suggesting that people in Dungavel *are* treated in this way), and goes on to make its main point, in italicised type: '*It is even worse when we do this to people who have not committed any crimes at all.*' The use of the third person plural (as in 'we do this to people...') sets up another 'us and them' pattern, of all non-asylum seekers versus asylum seekers. Neither the *Mirror* itself nor presumably most of its readers are involved personally in the detention process or advocate it, so this use of 'we' suggests that people should take responsibility even if they are not themselves involved, i.e. that they should campaign against Dungavel.

The headline and sub-head of the article read: 'Refugees moved over riot fears' and 'Dungavel suicide sparks asylum seeker alert'. The use of the word 'refugees' is positive and this time the suicide is mentioned, although the link made between the suicide and the potential riot(s) is indirect. However, the link is made explicit in the lead sentence: 'A group of asylum seekers have been moved from Dungavel detention centre amid fears a detainee's suicide could spark riots.' The reason for the suicide is given as follows: 'The 23-year-old Vietnamese man killed himself after being moved from a unit near London only last week.' The photographs accompanying the article are a main photograph of Dungavel, taken from a low

angle, which makes it look imposing (but without showing the fences that surround it), and an inset of Aamer Anwar speaking.

The *Dundee Courier* carried the story on the same day, as a small piece on page eight headlined: 'Dungavel death to be probed'. As in the *Mirror*, it is taken for granted that readers will be familiar with Dungavel. Like *The Scotsman*, the *Courier* claims that campaigners blame the man's suicide on his being moved, when their quotes suggest that they blame the detention system in general. The final source to be quoted is David Blunkett, who says the conditions at Dungavel are 'entirely satisfactory'. Arguably, when a number of sources appear one after the other, they tend to be read as an argument, and therefore the decision on who is given 'the last word' may have implications for which point of view appears dominant to readers. On the other hand, placing his words at the end could imply irony on the part of the paper, thus actually diminishing the impact of what was said.

The Press and Journal also carried the story that day, in the middle of page nine. The headline reads: 'Investigation ordered after refugee dies at Dungavel'. A broader range of sources is quoted in this article than in the others. It begins with the Home Office and the man's next of kin and then moves on to campaigners, of whom four are cited. Again, the campaigners are introduced as blaming the move for the suicide. However, the photograph of Aamer Anwar that accompanies the article is captioned: 'Aamer Anwar ... system barbaric', which highlights his view that it was the fault of the detention system as a whole.

The *Scottish Daily Mail* also carried the story on 26 July, but a lot later in the paper, at the bottom of page 23. The headline reads: 'Riot fear after suicide at Dungavel asylum centre'. As with the events at Harmondsworth, the *Mail* chooses to focus on the topic of violence. It begins with the word 'riot', though in fact there has been no

violence except the young man's suicide itself; it is simply something that could possibly happen, given the example of Harmondsworth.

The lead sentence reads: 'Fears of severe unrest among asylum seekers held at detention centres were growing last night after an inmate killed himself after being caught up in a riot.' Referring to the man who died as 'an inmate' has negative connotations as it implies he was a criminal. The sentence suggests that the 'riot' was the cause of the suicide, and a cause and effect pattern develops as the article continues. In the fifth sentence we are told: 'Harmondsworth was temporarily closed after a massive riot last week sparked by another suicide.' Later again, two sources are quoted: Rosie Kane MSP, who says that being transported could be the reason for the suicide; and Aamer Anwar, who blames conditions in general. It could be argued that gradually working backwards in this way leaves readers with an inaccurate picture, as anyone who reads only the first half of the article will be led to believe that the suicide was caused by the riot, and by extension that it was the fault of other asylum seekers.

There is some irony in the positioning of this story: it appears below an article about a Scot held prisoner on Death Row in the USA (who subsequently was acquitted, pending appeal). The article details how the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, is planning to step in and attempt to save his life. This shows a member of the UK government reacting against one (arguably unjust) system of detention, while another (also arguably unjust) system exists in the UK and is currently in crisis.

The *Scottish Sun* also carried the story on 26 July, in the right-hand column of page 25. Its placement beside a celebrity story could be seen as insensitive. The headline and lead sentence read: 'Asylum suicide probed' and 'A probe is underway after an asylum seeker committed suicide at a Scots detention centre.' No prior knowledge of

Dungavel is assumed here, but the fact that it is referred to as a 'Scots' detention centre may suggest that the piece originally appeared in the UK-wide version of the *Sun* and has not been modified for a Scottish audience

A photograph of Dungavel, which clearly shows the wire fencing around it, accompanies it. The caption reads: 'Horror ... Vietnamese man killed himself at Dungavel'. There is also a sub-head that reads: 'Tragedy of man, 22' (the *Mirror* reported he was 23). Referring to the victim simply as a 'man' reminds readers of his humanity, rather than categorising him under a single aspect of his identity, as an asylum seeker (although, of course, had he not been an asylum seeker, he would not have been in detention in the first place). This coverage is relatively positive compared with other articles from the same newspaper, although it still provides little context for the suicide.

Crime

"Asylum and the racist crimewave" Mail 23/8/04

Articles in the sample dealt both with crimes committed *by* asylum seekers (sometimes allegedly) and crimes committed *against* asylum seekers. Some contained comment on the general issue of asylum and crime, including the fact that asylum seekers are sometimes portrayed as criminals when they have not committed any crime. This type of article focused to some extent on telephone tagging, a new initiative that aims to track asylum seeker by providing mobile phone that they must carry with them so that their whereabouts can be monitored, but to a larger extent on detention, specifically arguments around whether children, or indeed anyone, should be detained at Dungavel Removal Centre (some of the issues around Dungavel are dealt with in more detail in a later section).

In the articles about crimes committed by asylum seekers, there was a tendency either to over-emphasise or under-emphasise the fact that the perpetrator(s) was an asylum seeker. For example, stories about a group of Afghan men who had carried out a hijacking in order to claim asylum, and who were still living in the UK, tended not to focus sufficiently on the fact that the men involved were seeking asylum. The articles pointed out an apparent contradiction between people having committed a crime and now being able to live freely in the UK, but failed to put into context their reasons for wanting or needing to come to the UK in the first place. One article, on the front page of the *Scottish Daily Express*, covered an alleged plot to kill the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. It is striking that this story was front-page news, despite the fact that there was no evidence to back it up.

The following section examines in detail one set of articles about asylum seekers (allegedly) committing crime and another set about crimes committed against asylum seekers. They are similar in that each focuses on the comments of a particular individual, in the former case a female police officer from the Medway area in southern England and in the latter a Scottish judge. The WPC claimed that levels of crime among asylum seekers in Medway were much higher than the local council had realised or admitted. The articles varied notably in the extent to which the WPC's opinions were expressed as fact, and in the extent to which challenges to her opinion were stated and where they were placed. In the articles about the judge speaking out against racist crimes against asylum seekers, the coverage tended to be more balanced.

WPC: 'Asylum seekers are criminal'

A WPC in Medway, southern England claimed that the local council was underestimating the levels of violence that were caused by asylum seekers being

housed in the area. The *Scottish Daily Mail* carried this story on Tuesday 20 July, devoting the top two-thirds of page eight to it. The headline reads: 'WPC who dared to tell truth on asylum seekers' — framing as truth that which in reality was opinion. The use of the word 'dared' suggests that speaking out on this issue had taken courage. Since what the officer said is framed as 'truth', this in effect implies that there was some sort of cover-up going on regarding asylum seekers.

It is important to reiterate the point that newspaper readers generally do not read the whole paper from front to back. They tend to look at headlines to get the general gist of the day's news and read only those stories that are of interest to them. Even then, they may read only part of the story, so — particularly in an article covering a contentious issue — *who* is sourced and *where* in the article they are sourced are key to their understanding. The council had challenged the WPC's claims, but the *Mail* did not quote any sources from the council until the end of a relatively long article — allowing the suggestion carried in the headline to stand in its readers' minds.

The sub-head reads: 'Stabbings, robberies, hundreds of squatters and a no-go shopping centre. That's the reality, warns policewoman'. The word 'reality' underlines that this is being framed as truth, while listing the alleged events and situations in this way gives weight to them, making the whole appear to be more than the sum of its parts. Furthermore, no quotation marks are used, which we would expect if this were a direct quote from what the WPC had said. Their omission suggests some editorialising on the part of the paper, and further frames the WPC's opinion as fact.

A sentence in the body of story says that the WPC 'shocked councillors by telling them they were underestimating the impact of asylum seekers'. The use of 'telling' again suggests fact: words such as 'claiming' or 'suggesting' could have been used

instead. And 'shocked' seems rather strong when we finally get to hear from one of the councillors, at the end of the article. He is reported as saying that it is not always the asylum seeker who is the perpetrator of the crime and that the crimes in question are 'in no way disproportionate to the crime levels in Medway'.

The *Scottish Daily Express* carried this story a day later, on Wednesday 21 July, on page two. The headline reads: 'Praise for WPC who spoke out'. This is a contentious claim: it was not the case that the WPC was praised by everyone who heard about her actions — indeed, the council challenged her claims. Therefore, the headline would not appear to be a fair representation of the facts.

In similar vein to the *Daily Mail*, the lead sentence in the *Express* article reads: 'A straight-talking policewoman was the toast of the town last night for daring to tell the truth on how asylum seekers were wrecking residents' lives'. Again the WPC's claims are framed as fact and again there is a suggestion of her facing difficulty in making them. Describing her as 'the toast of the town' suggests that support for her was unanimous, when this was certainly not the case.

The phrase 'how asylum seekers were wrecking residents' lives' raises two issues. First, it polarises 'asylum seekers' and 'residents'. The implication is that asylum seekers in the area are not to be considered 'residents', and thus are not seen as part of the community. Second, there is no qualification in terms of numbers, the implication being that all asylum seekers are causing difficulties for all (other) residents. The quote from the councillor in the *Mail* article says that not all crimes were perpetrated by asylum seekers. The *Express* article also places its quote from the council at the end of the article. It reads: 'A council spokeswoman said: "The last thing we want to do is increase tension. We believe the facts and figures used by the WPC were anecdotal and are yet to be substantiated"'.

Racist crimes against asylum seekers

A number of papers carried this story on Tuesday 10 August, but it is interesting to compare how far up the news agenda each placed it, and the language they used to label those found guilty of the crimes.

The *Scottish Daily Mirror* carried the story at the top of page two. The headline reads: 'Sheriff slams racist thugs'. The article reports that a sheriff has sentenced a group of young men for attacks on asylum seekers, and quotes him as saying: 'People come here seeking refuge and support, but end up victims of crimes committed for nothing more than sport — recreational racism'. This quote, voicing an opinion that Scotland should be welcoming to asylum seekers, is given prominence by its appearance on page two.

The Herald carried the story at the top of page seven, also relatively high on the news agenda, although not as high as in the *Mirror*. The headline and sub-head read: 'Race attacks on asylum seekers "are now a sport". Sheriff criticises "cowardly offences" by youths'. From the evidence of this study, both the *Scottish Daily Mirror* and *The Herald* take a relatively pro-asylum stance. However, although in these articles both are highlighting crimes against asylum seekers, the differences between them are as notable as the similarities.

The Herald foregrounds the asylum issue more than the *Mirror* does: in its main headline, the *Mirror* focuses on the young men and the fact that they are racist, whereas in the *Herald's* headline the focus is on the fact that racist attacks are being carried out on asylum seekers. While the *Mirror* labels the young men 'racist thugs', *The Herald* labels them as 'youths'. It could be argued that, while the *Mirror* simply

blames these particular young men for the attacks, *The Herald* may be considering that there is a wider issue of racism against asylum seekers and that these young men are simply examples of those who are responsible for it.

The *Daily Record* carried the story at the top of page ten, with the headline and sub-head 'Asylum attacks "a sport"' and 'Sheriff blasts thugs'. This is quite similar to *The Herald's* approach in that the attacks against asylum seekers are highlighted before the perpetrators are introduced (although neither the attacks nor the perpetrators are labelled as 'racist', in the headline at least). The article's positioning in the paper suggests that it is of medium importance on the news agenda.

The *Glasgow Evening Times* carried the story at the bottom of page 18, with the headline and sub-head: 'Sheriff says racist attacks now a sport' and 'QC hits out as he locks up teenage thugs'. Again, asylum itself is not identified in either headline, which may seem surprising given the paper's relatively supportive (even campaigning) stance on the issue. However, it does appear in the lead sentence of the story, which reads: 'A sheriff has severely criticised attacks on asylum seekers in Glasgow, claiming they are now being "committed for sport"'.

Both the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* also carried this story and portrayed the young men who carried out the attacks negatively. However, again the placing of the articles within the paper and the focus of the headlines suggest differing approaches to the issue. The *Express* carried the story at the top of page 14, with the headline "'Recreational racism" is rife says sheriff'. Although the body of the article identifies the victims as asylum seekers, the headline does not, and this generalising of the issue could be argued to fit more with the paper's generally negative stance on asylum.

The *Mail* carried the story at the bottom of page 27, suggesting it was quite low on its agenda. The headline reads: 'Warning from sheriff over an epidemic of "recreational racism"'. Again the asylum issue is not highlighted until later in the body of the article.

The difference in focus in the way the various papers presented the story would seem to fit with the general nature of their coverage of asylum. It is worth noting that this was a 'Scottish' story, which may be partly the reason why the 'Scotland only' papers tended to carry it earlier in the paper than the Scottish editions of the UK-wide papers — although the paper that gave it the greatest prominence was the *Scottish Daily Mirror*.

As a follow-up, the *Daily Express* printed two letters about the issue on 11 and 12 August, and the *Daily Mail* printed one on 13 August. The letters in the *Express* were given the headings 'At last someone is taking a stand against racism' and 'Scotland must stand against race attackers'. Again the paper highlights the issue of race rather than asylum, even though the second letter is from a representative of the Scottish Refugee Council, whose own focus is on calling for the recognition of crimes against asylum seekers and refugees. The same letter appeared in the *Mail* on 13 August with the title 'Clear message', again with the focus taken off asylum. Both papers, while giving a voice to those speaking out on the issue, present the letters in a way that fits with their own news agendas.

Five days later, on 18 August, the *Daily Mail* carried another article on this topic, this time linking it to immigration (which it appears to confuse with asylum to some degree). This article appears on the front page whereas the earlier one appeared on page 27, and the angle it takes is completely different. This article has thus been highlighted to *Daily Mail* readers much more than the previous one. Although the racist attacks are mentioned in the second article, its main focus is on immigration,

and it turns the debate around in a way that could be seen blame asylum seekers themselves to some extent for the attacks they have been subjected to. The headline and sub-head read: 'Asylum and the racist crime wave' and 'Immigration crisis blamed for explosion in race-hate attacks'.

The third sentence of the article reads: 'The massive increase [in attacks] comes amid soaring immigration — both legal and illegal — across Scotland and there are fears the country will face increased racial tension and violence if the situation is allowed to continue unchecked'. These 'fears' are not sourced, but they are clearly linked to two distinct but related 'us and them' patterns: one of the indigenous population versus asylum seekers, and one of the indigenous population versus the Government. The latter link is reinforced by a statement that the rise in racist attacks has occurred 'since Labour came to power in 1997'. Nothing is said about how much the figures were rising (or otherwise) before this, but the implication is that the present Government is to blame.

Although the *Daily Mail* reported the initial story in quite a neutral way, its follow-up report both marginalises asylum seekers and uses them as for political capital. At the end of the article is some material about the judge's previous comments, along with a quote from a spokesperson for Positive Action in Housing, who says: 'A culture exists where some people think it is OK to carry out these racial attacks. It's a game for them, a sport'. Although this material provides background to the story, its inclusion is questionable, as neither of these people (as we know from the earlier reports) have concluded that the way to deal with racist attacks is to have fewer asylum seekers or immigrants entering the UK. The *Mail* could be accused of using sources to back up a story angle that does not reflect the views of the sources themselves.

Government policy

“Asylum – the spin and the reality” Express 25/8/04

This section focuses on the way that the various newspapers dealt with two reports on asylum seekers that were published during the period of research — one from a centre-right think tank, the other from the Home Office. There were striking contrasts in the ways in which different papers reported on these publications, and in particular in the way they presented the figures on asylum seekers in the UK (and elsewhere) mentioned by them. Newspapers generally did not quote numbers incorrectly when reporting statistical evidence. However, the choices they made in terms of what information was included or excluded, or foregrounded or backgrounded, certainly had the potential to affect readers’ understanding of the reports’ conclusions, and in some cases could be seen frankly as misrepresentation.

Articles were also analysed that featured comments made by Rocco Buttiglione, Italy’s Minister for European Affairs, who at the time was that country’s nominee as EU Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner (although his controversial views on issues such as homosexuality and the role of women meant that he was forced to withdraw his candidacy before taking up the post).

Other issues of UK government policy noted in the sample (though not discussed in detail here) include the Home Office’s announcement to use face-to-face meetings to tell asylum seekers when their applications have failed (focusing on the suggestion that they would otherwise be likely to abscond); the use of police cells to house asylum seekers (suggesting another link between asylum seekers and crime); and, more positively, the provision of training for refugees with healthcare skills, to enable them to work in the UK.

Policy Exchange report: UK ‘Tops for asylum’

On 9 August 2004, the *Scottish Sun* included a small article on page two about a report by the centre-right think tank Policy Exchange, which detailed the numbers of asylum seekers currently hosted by the Group of Seven (G7) countries. The headline and lead sentence read: ‘Tops for asylum’ and ‘Britain is the No 1 destination for asylum seekers among the wealthy G7 nations — letting in 1,000 times more than Japan’. The article does not make clear what it means by ‘destination’, i.e. whether it is referring to people who *seek* asylum or people who *gain* asylum. Neither does it make clear the relevance of the claim about Japan: in an article about a report dealing with asylum in a number of countries, it is very selective to single out for comparison only the one that presents the greatest contrast.

The *Scottish Daily Express* on 9th of August includes an article on the report on page nine. The headline and lead read: ‘Britain No 1 for asylum’ and ‘We allow more refugees in than any other country’. The first thing to point out here is that the terms ‘asylum [seeker]’ and ‘refugee’ are used interchangeably, when they have quite different meanings. Secondly, the claim ‘than any other country’ is problematic: the report refers only to a limited number of developed countries. Indeed, the context is narrowed in the next sentence, which states that ‘Britain is still the top destination for asylum seekers in the developed world, a devastating report revealed yesterday’, This is a clear case of the headline and lead sentence not reflecting the content of the rest of the article.

The word ‘devastating’ is emotive and expresses an opinion and, as such, would be better suited to an editorial leader column than to a news article. As it is, it ‘editorialises’ the report, potentially manipulating the reader’s opinion to match the paper’s ‘line’ on the issue of asylum. Furthermore, this is a statistical report, and

statistics can always be manipulated to 'prove' a particular point. Use of the word 'revealed', however, implies that the figures are purely factual.

A later sentence reads: 'Despite government boasts [a typo for 'boasts'] of a crackdown on asylum claims, it still grants asylum to more people each year than Germany, Canada, and the United States'. The relevance of these three countries to the situation in the UK is not made clear. It is also unclear whether the sentence refers to each one of these countries individually or to all three put together. Policy Exchange is referred to as a 'respected think tank' and its ideological position is not stated. The article includes a graph, the effect of which is to make the findings look 'scientific'. However, the graph shows only the number of asylum applications granted by the UK, relative to other countries, for 2003. This is a limited picture in that it does not show trends, and also in that it shows only actual numbers and not percentages.

The *Express* also prints an opinion piece about the Policy Exchange report, by David Davis, the Shadow Home Secretary, alongside its leader column. The headline for this reads: 'As a report says immigration policy is failing ... how Blair betrayed Britain on asylum'. The paper would appear to be using the asylum issue for political gain, employing figures from the report and opinion from an opposition politician to reinforce its own anti-Labour stance.

Interestingly, this piece tells us that 'with application acceptance rates of 18 per cent in 2003, Britain now has the third largest refugee population in the G7 countries, with nearly 280,000 refugees in 2003'. The distinction between refugees and asylum seekers is again blurred. This is the first time that the size of the 'refugee' population has been mentioned and, by this analysis, Britain has only the third largest 'refugee' population, while the figures for 2003 presented elsewhere have implied it has the

biggest. This new information is backgrounded and, as the claim of Britain's 'first place' has already been reinforced, it would be easy for the casual reader to miss it.

The *Daily Record's* story on the Policy Exchange report appears at the bottom of page two, with the headline 'UK tops asylum league'. Again the actual numbers are foregrounded and the percentage of acceptances backgrounded, which supports as fact the claim that Britain is 'top' of the 'asylum league', when the figures could be used in other ways to suggest otherwise. However, the article does refer to Policy Exchange as a 'centre-right' think tank. It includes comments from the organisation's head, Nicholas Boles, and also from the Home Office; this is somewhat more balanced than other papers, which quote only Policy Exchange and/or Conservative Party spokespeople.

The Press and Journal and *The Herald* also carried the story, at the top of page 11 and on page six respectively. The way they discuss the report is subtly different to that of the other articles considered. *The Press and Journal* headline reads: 'Britain is still top choice for asylum seekers, says report'. By presenting a picture of asylum seekers choosing to come to the UK rather than one of officials simply monitoring the numbers that come in, it suggests that the UK is an attractive and perhaps a welcoming place for refugees. The inclusion of the qualifier 'says report' in the headline avoids presenting the analysis as fact, in the way that some other papers do, thus distancing *The Press and Journal* from its source.

In the second sentence we read: 'Although recent legislation has had some impact, Britain still grants asylum to more people each year than Germany, Canada and even the US, according to the report by the centre right Policy exchange" which suggests that we should also be paying attention to changing trends. A later sentence says: 'The figures showed that last year, Britain granted 26,921 asylum applications, and

the application acceptance rate of 18 per cent was among the highest in the G7.'

While the article still states that Britain is accepting more asylum seekers than other nations in terms of pure numbers, it points out that it is only 'among the highest' in terms of the percentage of applications accepted. Even so, this information is backgrounded, and we are not told anything about percentages in terms of the total population, which would also be relevant.

At the end of the article, the importance of trends is reintroduced: we hear that acceptance rates in the UK have fallen from 29 per cent in 2000 to 18 per cent in 2004.

The Herald's headline reads: 'UK still top choice for refugees, says think-tank report'. Like *The Press and Journal*, it places its focus on the choices made by those coming to the UK, rather than on those making decisions on asylum claims. Moreover, *The Herald* refers to those coming to the UK as 'refugees' rather than 'asylum seekers'. This portrays their identity in a relatively more empowered way: .It is interesting to note that perhaps the term asylum seeker has taken on such negative connotations and is frequently identified as a politically sensitive term, that there may be an effort on the part of some to use the term refugee to present information with empathy and in a neutral way. *The Herald* too refers to the report in its headline and specifies it as coming from a think tank. This makes an immediate suggestion to readers to treat any figures cautiously. Later in the article, *The Herald*, like the *Daily Record*, points out that Policy Exchange has a 'centre-right' orientation.

Home Office report: 'Asylum figures are falling'

On 25 August, a number of papers reported on new Home Office figures that suggested asylum applications were falling. The *Glasgow Evening Times* placed a

small article on page four, under the headline: 'Fall in asylum figures'. It reproduces the report's findings that asylum applications in the first three months of 2004 fell by 20 per cent and that the 2003 figure, excluding dependants, was 41 per cent lower than the figure for 2002. *The Scotsman*, whose article appears at the top of page six, has the headline 'Fewer asylum seekers arrive in the UK'. It reproduces the Home Office figures, but goes on to say that there are critics who disagree with the figures. A quote is included from some critics including David Davis, then Shadow Home Secretary and Sir Andrew Green from Migration Watch

The *Dundee Courier's* article appears at the bottom of page nine. Its headline reads: 'Drop in asylum figures not the full picture' which, unlike the first two articles, actually questions the Home Office claim. The *Courier* discusses the fall in asylum figures but also points to increases in the numbers of immigrants. It includes quotes from the Citizenship and Immigration Minister Des Browne, David Davis, the Shadow Home Secretary, and Mark Oaten of the Liberal Democrats.

The Press and Journal, which carries a piece at the top of page nine, questions the Home Office claim more explicitly, with a headline that reads: 'Asylum figures are down — but other immigrants on rise'. This article has largely the same structure and uses the same sources as the one in the *Courier*, but it also includes a quote from the head of Migration Watch.

The Herald, whose article appears at the top of page six, takes a different tack in its headline and sub-head, which read: 'Gloves off in publicity fight over asylum seeker policy' and: 'Ministers may reveal personal details'. The article reports that the government may reveal personal details of some of those held in detention in order to counter adverse publicity. There is a quote from Des Browne, criticising those who make political capital out of asylum seekers; up to this point, he says, the government has refused to comment on individual cases. *The Herald* also makes the

link to immigration, pointing out: 'The Home Office figures showed the total number of immigrants, as opposed to asylum seekers, had risen by 20 per cent'. However, it comments positively on this, pointing out that immigration has attracted skills to the country.

The *Sun*'s story appears at the bottom of page two, with the headline 'Asylum claims wrap'. This is the first of the articles in this sample to accuse the government of spin. The lead sentence reads: 'Ministers were last night accused of using a drop in asylum claims to conceal the true scale of illegal immigration'. It is notable that the *Sun* focuses on 'illegal immigrants': both the *Courier* and *The Press and Journal*, for instance, talk about rises in immigration figures, but make no link to illegal immigration.

The *Scottish Daily Mail* devotes the whole of page six to the issue of asylum, with a main article headlined: '140,000 migrants settle in Britain in one year'. There are three questions at issue here. Firstly, using a figure, especially a high one, without any context or comparison, does not demonstrate to readers its relevance; instead, it simply suggests that the figure is too high. Secondly, it is not clear who is meant by 'migrants' — immigrants? asylum seekers? refugees? all of the above? Thirdly, it is questionable whether this headline is representative of the content of the article; the headline puts a definite spin on its interpretation of the Home Office figures. The article talks about the fall in asylum figures but contrasts this with the number of work permits granted, which it says has 'soared' in the past decade. It claims that David Blunkett wanted to issue 175,000 work permits in 2004, 'which [would] more than swallow up any fall in asylum applications'. 'Soared' and 'swallow up' are both examples of language with negative connotations; 'swallow up' echoes dehumanising metaphors such as 'flood' and 'swamp'.

The article also claims that 'removals' are down. It quotes figures showing that in 2003 13,000 'failed asylum seekers' were deported, but that in total 53,865, not including dependants, had had their cases refused. The suggestion is that only a quarter of 'failed asylum seekers' were actually deported. However, we are not told if any of the 53,865 were eligible to appeal their case or had chosen to do so, which would make a significant difference to the comparative figures.

A supporting piece just below the main article has the headline: 'Asylum protest at too many chips'. It reports that asylum seekers at a hostel had protested because they felt the proportion of chips in their diet was too high. An early sentence, however, states: 'Mr Heyward [the manager] believes the protest was prompted by angry residents who had been left behind after two asylum seekers were moved out for fighting'. This changes the tone of the article, suggesting that rather than having something valid to protest about, the asylum seekers were simply causing trouble. There are no quotes from the asylum seekers themselves to give their version of events. Placing this article alongside the one on asylum and immigration figures would seem to reinforce the contention that asylum seekers have a tendency to commit crime and that therefore having more of them in the country would be likely to cause problems.

The *Daily Express* ran a double-page spread on pages four and five. The headline reads: 'Asylum: the spin ... and the reality'. This article goes furthest in challenging the Home Office figures. It does not present two sides of an argument; instead, it suggests from the outset that the Home Office is not telling the whole truth and that the *Express*, on the other hand, is. The 'us and them' pattern created here is one of the *Express* and its readers versus the Home Office (and by extension the Government as a whole). This is a clear example of how this particular paper

attempts to use news issues to portray its party political (i.e. Conservative) position as the norm. In this case, asylum seekers are exploited as pawns in the game.

Most of the other articles considered here are structured to introduce the Home Office figures and then to challenge them or to quote others who have challenged them. This article does just the opposite. Its *last* sentence reads: 'Revised asylum figures for 2003 showed applications, excluding children and other dependants, fell by 41 per cent to 49,405. A total of 28 per cent were allowed to stay in Britain'. The thrust of everything that precedes this is that the only reason the figures are falling is that, instead of going through official channels, people are coming to Britain illegally.

The *Daily Express*, article contains many statistics, but few are put into context. For example, we are told that there has been a fall in asylum applications, it is explained this is because refugees are 'sneaking into Britain illegally', and that 3,725 'failed refugees' had been deported over a three month period. The article also states that a fifth of rejections (2,755), known as negative asylum decisions, are overturned on appeal, but this is immediately followed by a quote from Andrew Green, chairman of the Migration Watch, who says: 'Removals are down, despite the fact that only one in five of failed asylum seekers is removed'. In fact, it is probably the case that only a fifth of failed asylum seekers are 'removed' immediately precisely because many of the others are appealing.

Like the *Mail*, the *Express* creates a link between the Home Office report and protesting asylum seekers. However, this time diet is not the issue; instead, the *Express* carries a photograph of asylum seekers blocking a road, and tells us they are protesting about not being moved from their temporary accommodation when some others have been. The spread also includes two boxes on Government policy labelled 'What they say' and 'What they mean'. These further reinforce the idea that

everything the Government says is open to doubt, while the *Express's* line on the story is the 'truth'.

Comments by Rocco Buttiglione

In late August 2004, Rocco Buttiglione, nominated by Italy as the EU's new Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner, made comments about various (arguably already marginalised) groups in society, which eventually led to him having to withdraw his candidacy (he never took up the post). The general opinion of the UK media on what he said was negative. However, the *Scottish Daily Express* picked up on his comments about asylum and immigration and used them to reinforce its own position on the issue.

On 23 August the *Express* published a full-page article on page four, along with a discussion of Buttiglione's remarks in an editorial on page 12. The headline accompanying the article reads: 'Everyone knows Britain is a soft touch on asylum'. This presents opinion as fact, and is a very clear example of a paper using a news article to editorialise. The lead sentence reads: 'Asylum seekers heading for Europe are a "ticking timebomb", Britain was warned last night.' 'Warned' is another example of editorialising, and suggests that the paper agrees with the person who made the claim.

The article goes on to say 'The alert came from the EU's new justice chief, who called for tough new guidelines to clamp down on bogus refugees'. The fact that the article is based on the opinions of Rocco Buttiglione makes the editorialising in the headline even more obvious because, as mentioned above, it was very much not the case that 'everyone' agreed with him. The use of the term 'bogus refugee' raises another problem. Previous studies have made the point that 'bogus asylum seeker'

and 'illegal asylum seeker' are meaningless constructions. Although the present study indicates that these terms are present a handful of times, they appear less than other studies have found. It appears that to some extent they have been replaced with 'bogus refugee' or 'illegal refugee', which both appear a number of times in the sample. 'Bogus refugee' is itself a potentially meaningless construction, but it still carries the negative connotation of a person attempting to trick the authorities. And by using this construction, the *Express* suggests that it is qualified to decide whose claims are valid and whose are not, however the people concerned may view their own situations.

The article states: '[The warning] comes only days after a report revealed that Britain is still the top destination for asylum seekers in the developed world'. There is no context given for this, not even the figures on which the paper chose to focus in its previous article. Thus two very selective pieces of information have been used to reinforce the general claim that 'Britain is a soft touch on asylum'.

A supporting piece appears under the headline: 'Refugees risking death to reach UK'. In the context of the main article, this clearly implies that people think that, if they can reach the UK, they will be able to stay there. The focus of the article is quickly shifted from this point to the alleged violence of Iraqi asylum seekers. It states baldly that 'Iraqi asylum seekers have built a reputation for violence' and tells the story of a truck driver on whose truck a number of Iraqi asylum seekers attempted to enter Britain, and who was told he would have his throat cut if he talked to the press. This further reinforces the general suggestion that asylum seekers have a tendency towards criminality.

There is a box accompanying these two articles that contains the question 'Does Britain need more immigrants? Yes/No'. Apart from the fact that the articles focus

specifically on asylum seekers while this question asks more generally about immigrants, thus mixing up the two definitions, the choice of the word 'need' is loaded. Even if people think that 'immigrants' should be *allowed* to stay in Britain, it is not necessarily the case that they think Britain '*needs*' more: the question is clearly worded for a 'no' vote.

The *Express* leader is headed: 'Time to heed warnings'. Again, the word 'warnings' suggests that the issue is one of fact as opposed to opinion. The editorial quotes Sig. Buttiglione as a source and talks about a 'timebomb ticking on our borders' and the 'influx' that 'could swamp parts of the EU'. Previous studies have called for the media to avoid metaphors such as 'swamp' and 'flood', which fail to view asylum seekers as individuals but rather portray them as a mass mob. 'Timebomb' carries suggestions of devastation and also of criminality. This leader is particularly notable in that it uses words that do not generally appear elsewhere in the sample. It would appear that the *Express* has taken advantage of the terminology used by Rocco Buttiglione to convey its own views on asylum.

4. CONCLUSION

The approach taken by this study builds on that used in previous reports examining the way that issues of asylum are presented in the media. Its findings highlight the considerable differences that are to be found in the way newspapers report on asylum, even when dealing with the same set of events. It demonstrates how nuances of meaning reflect the papers' own wider political orientation and attitudes to issues such as immigration, and in some cases support a predetermined editorial 'line'. A number of issues in particular emerge. These include the way articles are structured, what they state explicitly and what they infer, the language they use, and the way they set up oppositional patterns of 'us and them'. These issues are examined in greater detail below.

Issues of structure

The two main issues concerning the way articles in the sample were structured are the relationship (or lack of it) between headlines, sub-heads, lead sentence and the body copy of articles, and the way questions of cause and effect were presented, or inferred. In many cases, the development of a story from a headline through its sub-head, lead sentence and body copy was transparent. However, this is considerably less true of the way that certain papers handled some specific issues.

The most questionable examples were the reporting of the events at Harmondsworth and Dungavel removal centres, and the presentation of the Policy Exchange and Home Office reports on the numbers of people seeking asylum. Many different angles were taken in headlines about the violence at Harmondsworth, though only one (in the *Glasgow Evening Times*) actually mentioned the fact that a detainee had committed suicide. Some focused on the violence as a 'stand-alone' issue, while

others combined it with the questions of damage and the projected cost to the taxpayer (the *Scottish Daily Mail*, *Scottish Daily Express*, and the *Scottish Sun*). It seems a reasonable assumption that a focus of this sort in a headline might encourage readers to view the role of asylum seekers in the events reported negatively from the outset. Most of the articles do not mention any potential reason for the violence until considerably later on.

Many papers failed to provide a full context for the events they reported. Articles about the suicide at Dungavel, for example, took varying steps back along the chain of cause and effect, but some did not mention the suicide at Harmondsworth. This creates an impression — either inadvertently or deliberately — that the detainee at Dungavel committed suicide either because he had been moved or because he had witnessed the previous violence. In their coverage of the two reports on asylum numbers, meanwhile, both the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mail* headlines focused very selectively on relatively minor aspects of the findings.

Papers varied greatly in the sources they chose to quote in their articles. In the context of asylum, as in many others, the notion of ‘balance’ is a difficult one to realise. If, for example, a newspaper quotes two spokespeople from opposing political parties, it can give the impression that opinion is split clearly between two sides of an argument, while the reality may be a great deal more complex.

Nonetheless, some articles manage to be relatively balanced in that they include quotes from people representing a diversity of views, even if those on the pro-asylum side of the debate tend to be drawn from among ‘the usual suspects’. Political parties are heavily represented, though one positive aspect of this is that the shape of the Scottish parliament is reflected relatively fairly. The Scottish Socialist Party is well represented and there is some input from the larger Scottish National Party, along

with the usual Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Conservative spokespeople who tend to be quoted in the wider UK press (though the Green Party is not represented).

Certain other papers, however, particularly the Scottish editions of UK-wide publications, were less balanced, sometimes quoting a spokesperson from only one political party. This applies in the main to the Conservative-leaning *Scottish Daily Mail* and *Scottish Daily Express*, which on certain occasions could be accused of using the asylum issue as ammunition in a wider political debate. This is all the more noticeable in the Scottish context, as the Conservative party in Scotland is much smaller in terms of parliamentary representation than it is in England

Non-government organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers were represented in some reports. However, given the large number of such groups active in Scotland, there is no clear picture of the work being done or the spread of opinion across different organisations. Almost every quote supplied by an NGO/Campaign Group comes from either, the Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees, or Positive Action in Housing.

Asylum seekers themselves were quoted only a handful of times in the sample. However, as previous studies have pointed out, this may not be entirely the fault of the press. Asylum seekers are often reluctant to speak to the media because they fear danger; either in the UK or in the country they have come from and to which they may have to return. Anecdotally many have said that speaking publicly, especially about the aspects of government policy that are directly affecting them may impact negatively on their asylum claim.

What is said explicitly, and what is inferred

Papers varied widely in the stories they chose to carry. This, of course, is their prerogative, but the different presences and absences are interesting to observe. For example, the story about the alleged plot to kill Tony Blair was carried by only one paper, the *Scottish Daily Express*, a paper whose coverage of asylum issues is generally negative. There were only a few positive stories, and most of these appeared in papers whose stance on asylum is generally positive, for example the *Evening Times*.

The lack of positive stories is of particular concern. Several of the papers in the sample are sympathetic, to differing degrees, to the situations in which asylum seekers find themselves. A couple of them even take a campaigning stance — against, for example, the detention of asylum seekers. However, challenging negative coverage of asylum is not the same as deliberately carrying positive stories, about aspects of asylum seekers' lives *other* than the fact that they are seeking asylum. Generally however, in newspaper terms, good news is rarely news at all. In general, local papers are more likely to carry such 'human interest' stories than regional or national papers. Of the papers in the sample, for instance, the *Glasgow Evening Times* is more of a 'local' paper than many of the others and covered these kinds of articles. Again, part of the problem may be that asylum seekers are reluctant to speak to the media, and when they do it tends to be to speak specifically about their personal circumstances or about policies and processes such as detention or deportation, which adversely affect them.

As well as considering which papers carry which stories, it is instructive to look at *where* in the paper the stories appear. Generally speaking, the closer a story is to the front of the paper, the more and therefore more likely to be read by people, become a

talking point and enter public discourse. It is interesting to compare where reports of the suicide and violence at Harmondsworth and the suicide at Dungavel were placed in different papers. Those with a generally anti-asylum stance tended to carry stories about the former (mostly focusing on the violence) towards the front of the paper, and the latter towards the back (if at all), whereas papers with a generally pro-asylum stance tended to do the opposite. The *Scottish Daily Mail's* first report of racist crimes against asylum seekers appears on page 27, the furthest back of any paper, but its subsequent article on the issue, which links the crimes to a rise in immigration (implicitly blaming both asylum seekers themselves and the Government), appears on the front page.

In other cases, papers implied things that they could not say explicitly, because they had no evidence to support them. On several occasions, supporting articles appeared with main articles, containing a linked theme that implicitly suggests further conclusions. For example, the main article about the violence at Harmondsworth removal centre that appears in the *Scottish Daily Mail* is accompanied by a supporting article that suggests the centre is a place of luxury, and that the asylum seekers have no reason to be violent. One in the *Scottish Sun* is paired with a piece about homes lying empty and being kept on hold for asylum seekers, suggesting that the Government has failed in its 'management' of asylum. Although these articles were not detailed in this case study, it was interesting to observe where reports of suicide and violence at Harmondsworth and the suicide at Dungavel were placed, as compared with reports of the ensuing protests against detention and other aspects of government policy.

Newspapers assume to varying degrees that their readers will be familiar with certain places and institutions. Dungavel Removal Centre is variously called 'Dungavel', 'Dungavel detention centre', 'a Lanarkshire detention centre', and 'a Scots detention

centre'. Some of this variation is due simply to the level of coverage the paper gives the place over time. For example, *The Herald* and the *Scottish Mirror* frequently cover events and conditions at Dungavel, and so it can be expected that their readers will recognise the reference. Some of the variation, however, seems to be down to the fact that certain papers are merely Scottish editions of UK-wide publications. For example, the phrase 'a Scots detention centre' in an article in the *Scottish Sun* suggests that the Scottish audience is simply getting the UK-wide version of the story, with very few changes to take account of the Scottish context. Labelling and context are also relevant to the coverage of the Policy Exchange report on asylum numbers. While some papers (e.g. *The Herald*), refer to Policy Exchange as a 'centre-right think tank'; others simply refer to it as a 'think tank', or even a 'respected think tank' (the *Express*). Failing to declare the political stance of an organisation has important implications for the paper's presentation of the figures and the way readers interpret them. Readers could be encouraged to view the figures as pure fact, or at least as coming from a neutral source.

Questions of language

It would seem that the phrase 'illegal asylum seeker' is no longer being used, at least in the sample studied. This is a positive development, as one of the key points made by previous studies was that use of this phrase should be discouraged. However, the sample still shows considerable evidence of labels such as 'refugee', 'asylum seeker', and 'immigrant' being used interchangeably, clouding their meaning for the reader. Simple checklists of proscribed terms may be more likely to get results than complex discussion, but it seems perhaps that more of the latter is still required.

Of equal concern is the use of metaphors for asylum seekers coming into the UK. Previous studies have suggested that analogies such as 'flood', 'swamp', and 'influx'

should not be used, as they carry connotations of danger and portray asylum seekers as a faceless mass of people rather than as individuals. In the current sample, only the *Scottish Daily Express* used these particular terms. However, a number of other metaphors found were equally questionable. The *Daily Mail's* coverage of the Home Office report, for example, states that immigration figures would 'more than swallow up' any fall in asylum figures. Describing the violence at Harmondsworth detention centre, the *Scottish Daily Express* uses a hunting metaphor, 'corner', to describe the actions of the police, while it describes the situation in general by using military metaphors such as 'battle' and 'uprising', portraying the situation as a conflict between two sides. While it is acceptable for a newspaper to take an angle on a story, the fact that one (the *Express*) describes an event as a 'battle', while another (*The Herald*) describes it as 'disorder', implies that the two are telling altogether different stories.

On the whole, 'asylum seekers' are presented as the active parties in a sentence when they have done something that could be classed as negative. More sympathetic coverage tends to present them as passive, or as active but asking for help from elsewhere (as in the case of the Mongolian family awaiting deportation). Again, this highlights the lack of positive stories about asylum seekers.

'Us and them'

A number of subtly different 'us and them' patterns appear in the sample. The 'traditional' pattern of 'us', the indigenous population, versus 'them', asylum seekers, appears quite frequently, although it is more usually couched in terms of 'us', the taxpayers, versus 'them'. A variation on this, when it concerns the money being spent on asylum, is 'us', the taxpayers, versus 'them', the Government. These patterns appear most frequently in the *Scottish Daily Express* and the *Scottish Daily Mail* —

both of which could be described as Conservative-leaning papers — and to a slightly lesser extent in the *Scottish Sun*.

On the other side of the debate, two papers established quite different ‘us and them’ patterns. *The Herald* at one point, in relation to Dungavel Removal Centre, creates a pattern of ‘us’, the critics, versus ‘them’, the Government — not in relation to taxpayers’ money, but because it is questioning the validity of Dungavel’s existence, and suggesting that public opinion wishes it to be shut down. This is perhaps the only ‘us and them’ pattern in which refugees and asylum seekers can be seen as part of the ‘us’ group, along with other members of the Scottish public.

The *Scottish Daily Mirror* includes an interesting ‘us and them’ pattern in one of its editorials: one of ‘us’, the indigenous people of Britain, versus ‘them’, asylum seekers, but with a very different angle from the usual one. The suggestion is that ‘we’ are all implicated in the negative treatment, both official and unofficial, that asylum seekers endure, and that ‘we’ should all campaign against Dungavel specifically and, more generally, against the negative treatment of asylum seekers in the UK.

Dominance and deviance

It is clear from the research that the purely Scottish newspapers in the sample (as opposed to the Scottish editions of UK-wide papers) have a neutral to favourable stance on asylum. Their ‘dominant discourse’ (although there are often nuances of meaning and contradictions that confuse the issue) is that asylum seekers tend to be refugees who have fled intolerable situations in their home countries, and that they should be welcomed and treated with respect and dignity in Scotland.

Considering the widely read Scottish editions of UK-wide papers, however, the picture is not so positive. Here a discourse is very much in evidence that says asylum seekers cause problems for the people of Britain, either individually or as a result of Government policy. Of the UK-wide papers that have Scottish editions, the most pro-asylum is the *Scottish Daily Mirror*. It is interesting to note that the *Mirror* is relatively well differentiated for the Scottish context and a Scottish audience, while this is considerably less the case for the other three, the *Scottish Daily Mail*, the *Scottish Daily Express* and the *Scottish Sun*.

Conclusions

This analysis indicates that arguably, while there is a considerable amount of negative coverage of asylum issues in the Scottish press, there is a body of evidence detailing a pro-asylum stance within certain Newspapers. This reflects the findings of previous studies carried out in Scotland and in Wales (Oxfam 2001, the Welsh Media Group), which indicate that media coverage of asylum tends to be more favourable in these countries than in England. Furthermore, the proactively supportive coverage carried by some papers, particularly with regard to Dungavel Removal Centre, suggests that the situation has improved since the previous studies were carried out.

For the most part, newspapers in Scotland have made attempts to present ‘balanced’ stories, as regards the sources they consult and the quotes they carry, even if there is a tendency for non-political sources to be drawn from a group of ‘the usual suspects’ that represents only a few of the many NGOs working with asylum seekers.

However, certain of the shortcomings in media presentation highlighted by previous reports are still apparent in the sample analysed here — particularly the failure to provide a context for stories about asylum. Terminology is still an issue with certain

papers, which encourage a stereotypical 'us and them' pattern — although others challenge this pattern or set up alternatives.

Numbers, for the most part, appear to have been correctly used. However, the selective way in which newspapers present statistics can sometimes have implications for the way readers understand or evaluate an issue. This analysis also highlights the fact that — as previous research (Oxfam 2001, ICAR) also points out — some papers have a tendency to present asylum stories as evidence for the failure of Government policy, thus using events and statistics as a means of political 'point scoring'. Not only does asylum come to be viewed as a political issue rather than as a humanitarian one: individual asylum seekers themselves actually get 'lost' in an abstract debate, thus further dehumanising them.

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